

**LIBERATING THE SAMOAN
FEMALE BODY IN THE NOVELS
OF SIA FIGIEL: AN INSIDER
PERSPECTIVE**

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Malia Va'a Perelini

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the lived and embodied experiences of Samoan women as they are represented in Sia Figiel's novels. I argue that Sia Figiel portrays the Samoan female body as a living text of culture. Challenging palagi perceptions and stereotypes of the generic native body of the Polynesian/Samoan female, Figiel's depictions of growing up in Samoan society also raise issues for debate about certain aspects of the faaSamoa and the cultural and sexual boundaries imposed on Samoan women. I contend that Figiel's portrayal of Samoan women liberates them from homogenous constructions in western discourse, forces us to question traditional practices that deny voice to all women regardless of age or status, and gives us a universal voice to celebrate the ambivalence of the authentic Samoan female body.

INTRODUCTION

My interest in using the Samoan female body as a medium grew out of the fact that for most of us Samoan women, we didn't exist in the novels proliferating the Pacific... Samoa...the whole world...There was a great big void and we didn't feature in it...It is sad to know that the world knows about us from anthropologists or romantic fiction about the Pacific, but it doesn't know me, us...Outside knowledge of [Samoans] are stereotypes that hide our humanity as a people (Interview, 2002).

After colonisation comes the desire [of Pacific peoples] to be liberated, to write out [their resilience] and their ability to survive the impact of imperial domination, blending the 'received goods' from the West with those of their own indigenous homelands. There was a need to celebrate and to make sense of the many facets of the Pacific self which is made up of many voices and shifting identities – to externalise, to put outside what was previously held captive, often in turmoil, inside. This process of turning the inside out, creatively speaking, leads to a process that brings healing, as 'the [Pacific] other', the coloniser, is allowed to see the inside view, the emotional and cultural terrain/s of the decolonised writer and his/her experiences, to enter imaginatively into previously silenced/silent cultural spaces and stories (Vaai, 1999: 30).

The voluptuousness of Sia Figiel's physical presence is matched, if not overpowered, by a charismatic persona that is inconsistent with any preconceived notion of a typical Samoan woman. There are three types or notions of a stereotypical Samoan woman that one might encounter in literary and cultural discourse on the Pacific: the romanticised or sexualised one popularised in Western narratives; the native female body valorized in ethnographic texts; and the hybridised modern woman's body celebrated in contemporary Pacific literature. When one meets Sia Figiel, one finds out soon enough that it is not an easy task to place her into any one of those notions. When one reads her work, one realizes it is an even more daunting task to position her

female characters in the categories of Pacific Island or South Seas female stereotypes popularised in Western narratives (Suali'i in Jones, 2000: Taouma, 1998)

My interest in Sia Figiel's work was sparked by the striking similarity between her characters and the faaSamoa upbringing that I and my sisters, friends, and neighbours experienced. Her fictional characters are as real as any of the real-life Alofas or Sinivas or Lilis raised in the faaSamoa. Despite the vast difference in our ages, the fictional Alofa's adolescence and struggle for identity parallel and many others, in terms of the vividness of childhood memories growing up in and around Apia and mine. As the first Samoan and Pacific Island writer to win the Commonwealth Prize for Best First Book Award for the Pacific and Asian Region, she created a momentous milestone in Pacific and Samoan literary discourse. As a Samoan woman writing about Samoan women, she has re-invented the agency of Samoan women to be heard and heeded.

Figiel's fiction has shifted interest in the Samoan female body from the edge to the centre of western discourse. While conceptions of "native" female bodies can be seen as the mental and social constructions by outsiders, and therefore mythical or mere figments of a writer's imagination, or worse still flawed projections of a eurocentric gaze, those of Sia Figiel's are the product of the insider's view, of a "native" Samoan who has lived in Samoa most of her life and is therefore rooted in the land and customs of the people. This fact has the further advantage in that romanticism is minimized while real life is maximized within the fluid boundaries of Figiel's creative imagination. Figiel approaches her characters as only a Samoan woman, a native insider, could – with raw passion, compassion and the highest degree of empathy. She thus depicts brilliantly in her writings the reality of Samoan life and the passion that is the hallmark of a deep commitment to and love for a cause, namely, the faa-Samoa, or the Samoan way of life. Her characters are so 'realistic' that they reflect a literary yardstick for mimesis – the ability to evoke mental images which people recognize from their lived experiences and accept as valid (Durix, 1998).

The conscious attempt to mark the boundaries between colonial stereotypes of Samoan and Pacific women, and her own construction of female identity in Samoa

and the Pacific poses the biggest challenge Figiel has had to face as a writer and one that she readily accepts:

Do you know that when I first started writing, about 10 years ago, and I came to the University of Hawaii, someone said to me, 'What are you going to write about? Albert Wendt has written everything'. That's what the person said to me, and it was a woman writer (Interview, 2002).

Figiel concedes one certainty in the postcolonial vacuum created by such a remark - it gave her space to explore uncharted territory in contemporary Pacific literature, namely to write the Samoan female body as a living text of culture. This creative appropriation of the body is then manipulated in a variety of strategies as a 'writing-back model' (Edmond, 1997: 22), in order to return the male western gaze on Western or palagi representations of the other while at the same time turn the Samoan female gaze past critiquing the West onto Samoan society itself.

Figiel's challenge that 'we need to define ourselves and not be limited by (palagi) notions...because we come in all shapes, forms and sizes' (Interview, 2002) stems from frustration at misrepresentation of the Samoan female body or simply from a womanist's desire to reconstruct the Samoan female body into her vision for a more authentic model representative of the contemporary Samoan woman. Figiel defines herself as a womanist in the holistic sense of the term, embodying both elements of male and female that in the faaSamoa reflects the reciprocal relationships between men and women (Interview, 2002). Closely related to this is an ideological one, that of an indigenous/native or insider perspective. While Figiel makes no apologies in claiming authority as an insider, there are increasing complications in claiming privileges on the basis of indigeneity (Tavake, 2000: 160). The legacy of palagi misrepresentations of the native female body has been a springboard for indigenous writers to claim authority as insiders to try to rewrite their stories and their histories (Hereniko, 1999). Postcolonial critic Trinh Minh-ha calls attention to the complications and tensions of the insider-outsider debate when she asserts that '... there can hardly be such a thing as an essential inside that can be homogeneously represented by all insiders' (Trinh, 1989: 218). Trinh raises issues of loyalty and authenticity that affect judgements on the 'verisimilitude value of representations' by insiders (218). Nevertheless, 'Samoan writers like Albert Wendt and Sia Figiel are

unabashedly unapologetic about raising their creative voices 'in order to be free of those histories written about us, those images created by other people about us, not only in history books, but in fictions they've written about us' (Wendt in Hereniko, 1999: 9).

As an insider, I join the voices of Pacific writers and scholars who write from a position of subjective and authentic experiences to construct a new garland of images and voices of the female body. My definition of "authentic" is informed by Trinh Minh-Ha's conceptualizing of authenticity (Trinh, 1991). I argue that the ultimate test for authenticity is through 'lived reality' (1991: 54). It is that reality that enables me to adopt an essentialist approach when appropriating expressions like 'realistic', 'true' and 'experience' to describe how Figiel represents the Samoan female body in her novels. Writing from the inside, Figiel presents a *suifefiloi* of Samoan women: Samoan women *as they were* (in the lives of their grandmothers, for instance, and the mythical heroines of the past); *as they are* (in the lives of the female protagonists); and *as they hope to be* (in diaspora).

In the context of contemporary Pacific discourse, the Polynesian female body has become a popular site for and subject of postcolonial deconstruction. In the wider context of Figiel's narratives, it is a strategic tool for the boldly innovative and creative intersections of fact, fiction, and fable. Figiel attempts to deal with what has been and still is conceived as perhaps an embarrassingly and painfully controversial subject for all Samoans, especially women - the public inscription of their bodies as sexual objects under the scrutiny of the western gaze, not to mention the infamous reputation of the label 'free love society' among christianised Pacific Island neighbours. That is to say, the controversy sparked by Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* popularised the notion of Samoa as 'an instance of a free love society [that] encourage[d] the young, unmarried adolescence to engage in free sexual liaisons' (Va'a, 2000: 6; Freeman, 1983). To counter Mead's claims about our sexuality, Freeman offered an equally extreme exposition of the Samoan female body as murderous and suicidal (1983). A more serious controversy rages in contemporary society about the harsh disciplining by Samoan parents of their children. While Figiel is conscious like many Samoans of the stigma attached to the stereotype of Samoans as violent people who beat their children, the reality of a strict *faaSamoa* upbringing

premised on cultural and Christian values is firmly entrenched in the lives of many Samoans. Until Figiel and to a certain extent Wendt, the Samoan female had been given no direct narrative voice or agency to externalise those aspects of its traditional upbringing that personalised and authenticated its self and cultural identity. Figiel's work has broken through the barriers of timelessness and homogeneity that had confined the Samoan female body to what Vaai calls the 'previously silenced/silent cultural spaces' (30) of colonial and cultural discourse.

Within that context, this thesis presents a three-fold argument. Firstly, Figiel uses the female body as a text of culture and language to deconstruct stereotypes and re-construct authentic images and ideas about the Samoan girl/woman. By authentic, I refer to images and experiences derived by virtue of living or practising traditions pertaining to a specific culture. Secondly, Figiel's literary style illuminates from an insider perspective the true essence of the Samoan female. I am cognizant of the fact that the expression 'true essence' flies in the face of postmodernity, but in positioning myself as an insider/outsider, I am compelled for the following reasons to adopt a heterogenous approach: firstly, with authentic experience gained from indigeneity and genealogy, it is necessary in terms of my own analytical discourse to appeal to strategic essentialism in order to make certain strategic claims about the Samoan female body; secondly, as an outsider writing from within the walls of western academia, I use 'deconstruction' as a provisional and strategic tool to advance my argument, but ultimately, my critical reading practice is supported by a belief that there is a true Samoan essence which my analysis of Figiel's female characters will help to articulate. The final thrust of my argument is that by illuminating the true essence of the Samoan woman, Figiel gives her the voice and the agency to celebrate her uniqueness and in the end to liberate her from what had previously tied her to certain stock images – as a sexual siren in paradise, Samoan Sheila or jealous wife to name a few.

By liberation, I refer to the sense invoked by Sina Vaai in the epigraph that opens this Introduction, wherein she emphasises the need to 'externalise, to put outside what was previously held captive' (1999: 30). Figiel sets out to externalise the subjectivity of the Samoan female body in her fiction and through the creative process of literary

imaginings creates cultural spaces for a deeper understanding of the Samoan female and an increased awareness of cultural conditions that shape and nurture their selves and identities as Samoan. This is where the liberating aspect of Figiel's work comes in, for the sense of understanding and awareness that accompanies this 'process of turning the inside out' (30) liberates the body from the homogenising tendencies of both palagi misrepresentations and native conceptions of the Samoan woman. As a hybrid body that makes boundary crossings between insider (Samoan) and outsider (palagi) societies on a regular basis, Figiel projects in her fiction an authentic model of the Samoan female body that combines the past, the present and the future aspirations of Samoan women.

In Chapter 1, I trace the evolution of palagi paradigms that influenced the way Euroamericans imagined the Pacific/Polynesian/Tahitian/Samoan female body. This cultural history of images is examined against colonial and postcolonial theories, conceptualising the association of images of the other with the colonial project. The rest of the Chapters constitute what I call an authentic ethnobiography of growing up in the faaSamoa. Drawing upon Figiel's trilogy of fictions - *Where we once belonged* (1996a); *The Girl in the Moon Circle* (1996b); and *they who do not grieve* (2000), I present a cultural analysis of the Samoan female body as it is embodied in the characters of Alofa, Samoana and Malu. Other female characters are privileged in terms of their relationships with the protagonists. Selected passages are critically examined in the context of the wider social and cultural context of the faaSamoa and are informed by theoretical insights from postcolonial (Homi Bhabha, Franz Fanon, Rod Edmond, Greg Denning, Trinh Minh-Ha, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o), Pacific (Epeli Hau'ofa, Vilsoni Hereniko, Teresia Teaiwa) and insider/Samoan critics and scholars (Isaia Malopa'upo; Albert Wendt, Melani Anae; Tupua Tupuola Tamasese Efi; Anna-Marie Tupuola; Unasa Lleulu Va'a; Penelope Schoeffel-Meleisea) to name a few.

In Chapter 2, I present an insider perspective through the narrative voices of the young protagonists to analyze the way the social reality of the faaSamoa is inscribed culturally. Combining textual and contextual analysis, I expose cultural categories that inscribe social and sexual boundaries on the body and the various ways in which Samoan girls and women strive for agency and the freedom to explore and cross those

boundaries. I also focus on Figiel's narrative strategies, in particular on the way they reflect nuances and metaphors of the female body. Figiel's style of writing and use of language and myths enable her to return the palagi gaze and at the same time challenge the native gaze in ways that not only mock and mimic but also elevate and tolerate in the characteristic Samoan humour that Figiel appropriates so brilliantly through the narrative voices of her young protagonists. The development of an 'I' and 'We' self is traced back to how well the Samoan female body is able to negotiate a balance between the collective consciousness of the faaSamoa and an individual/cultural identity as a Samoan.

Chapter 3 discusses the Mead-Freeman debate and attempts to show that the Samoan female body neither falls within the paradigms of that debate nor outside it. A contextual background is provided by reference to the groundbreaking works of Isaia, Anae, Tupuola, Schoeffel-Meleisea, Shore, Mageo and illustrates with textual passages the turbulent stage of adolescent development in Samoa. Several incidents of violence and abuse are analysed in light of the Mead-Freeman controversy.

The Samoan female body in diaspora is the subject of analysis in Chapter 4. The search for meaning and identity in diaspora is complicated by states of abjection, mimicry, hybridity and ambivalence as they are experienced by the grown up Alofa, her Auntie Fue and her Grandmother Tausi. Alofa's rejection of her boyfriend Apa reveals a disillusionment with inscribed roles for women and her courage to negotiate a form of individuality that allows her to be independent of men but also enables her to keep her identity as a migrant body struggling within mainstream palagi society to find her self.

The Conclusion highlights the essential character of the Samoan woman as one who is self-empowered to improve her station in life, despite the intersection of cultural constraints on her body. A historical overview begins with a list of famous Samoan women who have achieved national fame and whose successes translate into a figure of ambivalent hybridity in a patriarchal society. I then summarise the ways in which Figiel empowers the Samoan female body with voice and agency in the various chapters. My conclusion pivots on a summary of how the intersections of bodies

across cultural and sexual boundaries in the previous Chapters demonstrate the way Figiel has managed to 'externalise', to bring out to the open the many layers of a Samoan woman's character hitherto unexplored or marginalized in colonial and postcolonial discourse. It is a literary feat that inevitably liberates the body from the ocean of images that had previously stereotyped Samoan women as static, marginalized entities of either noble or ignoble disposition.

CHAPTER 1: A GENEALOGY OF PALAGI PARADIGMS ON PARADISE

...is there not a liberation, too, in recognizing that no one can write about others any longer as if they were discrete objects or texts? (Clifford, 1988: 25).

Robert Louis Stevenson used the Pacific as exotic background; Herman Melville, Joseph Conrad and Somerset Maugham each created out of it 'a symbolic representation' of western beliefs, James A. Michener was a realist writing a kind of journalistic reportage. But while they all wrote about the Pacific as a kind of 'search for Paradise', a quest for an equatorial Eden, a striking feature was the almost total 'absence of islanders as authentic characters...general statements are substituted for exploration and analysis' (Eggleton, 1996: 163).

It is an Arcadian Pacific and for the most part, a pacific Pacific; a new region of the world to be desired by Europeans, sought out, converted to the true, Christian religion, rendered subservient, exploited. It is epitomized in Webber's portrait of Poedua, the daughter of Orio, chief of Raiatea. Here Webber builds upon that image of the Pacific...as young, feminine, desirable, and vulnerable, an ocean of desire. To her, during the next century, all the nations will come (Bernard Smith, cited in Borofsky, 2000: 64).

Much of Euroamerican literary discourse on the Pacific or South Seas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries perpetuated a Eurocentric perspectivism that posited the native other as an exotic object frozen under the scientific, scholastic and aesthetic scrutiny of the European gaze. This Eurocentric approach to studying or writing about 'others' has dominated much of western discourse on native Pacific cultures since the eighteenth century. Ethnographic narratives by explorers from Bougainville to Cook, travelling artists and writers like Melville, Gauguin and Stevenson, and anthropologists like Mead and Freeman, have opened a whole new Pandora's box of fact and fiction concerning issues of representing, describing and understanding

'others' (Geertz, 2000: 96). Until quite recently, much of this discourse has been carried out by *palagi*¹, whose dominance over scientific and academic epistemologies allows them to place the native self or body at the margins of their presumed 'territory' of privileged disciplines, thus rendering the native other 'silent' or 'powerless' in *palagi* discourse on native culture. This assumed dominance has come under attack over the past twenty-five years or so with demands for 'the restoration of a historical dimension to "primitive" or "simple" cultures, so often portrayed as "cold", unchanging, crystalline structures – human still-lives' (103). Western scholars, according to Geertz, are questioning the credibility of 'ordered accounts of other ways of being in the world – accounts that offer monological, comprehensive, and all-too-coherent explanations' (102). Pacific scholars and writers likewise challenge the authorial voice of the *palagi* observer in their representations of native culture and advocate a more holistic approach that embodies both an objective and subjective experience of reality (Hereniko, 1995: 8). In the context of this thesis, Figiel's fiction can also be read as part of this institutionalized opposition to western discourse on the part of the other. Figiel's work takes up the dissenting voices of others and weaves them into an *ula*² that restores the agency of the native voice, self or body previously subdued or lost in the peripheries of western hegemonic discourse on the Pacific.

Just as problematic is the pervasive legacy of stereotypical images of the native other cultivated, dramatised and romanticised in literary works of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and which sustained the grand narrative or myth of the South Seas Paradise (Hereniko, 1995). Ethnographic monographs, ship journals, travel writings and novels of romance and adventure in the South Seas have all contributed to the formulation of particular images of an islander or 'native' possessing certain physical, mental and social characteristics that fall within the European subject's preconceived notions of what an islander or native should look, think and be like. While the stereotype of the *ignoble savage* becomes a common trope for the representation of the native island man, particularly the Melanesian male whose perceived savagery missionary writings frequently deplored, the myth of the *nubile savagess* (Sturma, 1995) embodying 'unlimited sexuality' remains more or less the predominant trope in the construction of the Polynesian female body (Pickens, 1999;

¹ Samoan for Caucasian or one of Euroamerican appearance/descent.

Cameron, 1987). With the South Seas' spatial isolation from the West, it was not difficult for the European public to develop a fascination and fixation with a particular image of the native other, inspired by romanticised accounts of female native bodies, and complementing it with powerfully visual images created by artists such as Webber or Gauguin. Even in the twentieth century, after two centuries of contact and empirical knowledge about the natives, the concept of the South Seas or Pacific islands as isles of paradise inhabited by female bodies clothed in the garments of Eve was still very much prevalent in palagi discourse.

It was a very short step from that viewpoint to the kind of ideology that contributed to the writing and huge success of Margaret Mead's infamous text on the Samoans (Freeman, 1983), *Coming of Age* (1928), an anthropological bestseller that romanticised the Samoan female body as a cultural incarnation of promiscuous sexuality. Mead's re-invention of the noble savage paradigm was a literary composite of earlier palagi constructions of the other but framed within the ethnographic gaze to enhance claims to authenticity and authority. Derek Freeman's refutations of Mead's conclusions about Samoa appeared on the surface to be a valiant defence of the Samoans, from a native perspective, but on close analysis is simply the opposite end of the binary. Freeman invokes the ignoble savage paradigm, positing another unfavourable extreme of representation that leaves no in-between spaces or places for the native other to assert or claim authenticity of voice and experience.

Any attempt to understand this paradoxical bind of mis-representation needs to re-trace the history of ideas and images about the Polynesian female body as they were expressed in colonial discourse about others. In this chapter, I present a theoretical discussion on the nature of those images and the ideas that gave rise to them. I then trace what I call the 'evolution' of those images as they are embodied in myths and metaphors of the female body in Polynesia and at the same time locate them in selected texts. I argue that an understanding of the cultural history of palagi representations of femininity or the female body in the Pacific provides a broader contextual framework into which Figiel writes and to which she responds as a Pacific/Samoan writer. Figiel sets out in her fiction to reclaim a native voice that

² Samoan word for garland of flowers worn for festive/ceremonial occasions or for personal adornment

addresses issues of representation or misrepresentation in palagi discourse: 'What I'm more concerned about is bringing to the surface issues that have really pained us and issues that continue to make us suffer silently...it's not purely for Samoans...your people is not just Samoa but the whole Pacific Island/Ocean' (Interview, 2002).

Figiel's writing therefore responds to pre-existing traditions of palagi representations of the Pacific/Polynesian/Samoan female body. The contextual framework of those representations in turn, also provides a textual foundation for my reading of Figiel's work as an empowering intervention in those traditions.

1. THEORIZING THE MYTH OF PARADISE

The word 'image' is a root word for 'imagine' and 'imagination' and has various meanings and associations. The Oxford Dictionary gives six meanings of the word, thus: a representation of an object, especially the figure of a saint or divinity; the reputation or persona of a person; one's appearance as seen through a mirror or lens; a person or thing closely resembling another; an idea or conception; and lastly, a simile or metaphor. The terms 'imagine' and 'imagination' in the context of European discourse on the Pacific figure predominantly in the above meanings for 'to imagine' is to conceive or form a mental image or mental imagery, while 'imagination' refers to the 'creative faculty' of the mind. As Stephanie Taylor explains, to imagine or use one's imagination is to 'depart from reality' (Taylor in Maidment, 1998). Taylor goes on to argue how the task of creating an image for a product, organization or person involves manipulating appearances and also the ideas which people hold and the chains of association by which one idea is linked to another. Underlying each of these uses of 'image' is a contrast with truth or reality...there is the assumption that it is possible to go behind a public image in order to discover the real person or true situation. Images are therefore often considered superficial and even false, a temporary and 'second class' form of knowledge compared with 'real' knowledge, like facts, figures and true information...The images which people hold will shape, and often limit, their understanding of places, situations and relationships with others.

Images have important consequences because they can serve certain interests and warrant certain practices (1986: 86). This process of image construction of the other has of course been true since Plato and Aristotle.

Acknowledging that there is an 'intricate connection between the way a place or thing is described, the ideas people hold of it, their behaviour towards it (whether, for instance, they are respectful or exploitative) and the consequences of that behaviour', Taylor corroborates the contextual framework within which Euroamerican or palagi society conceptualized and imagined the Polynesian female body. The origins of these images, according to Taylor, can be found in the 'ideas and assumptions received from society and culture, mainly in the form of language' (Maidment, 1998: 187). In other words, the visual and written accounts of explorers, artists and travellers who came to the Pacific in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provided the original source for ideas and assumptions to be formed about the other.

Edward Said's landmark text *Orientalism* (Said, 1978) explores the ways in which peoples of the East, the Orient, are constructed and represented in Euroamerican discourse as the other, a collective label applied to people of the East as a metaphorical confirmation and celebration of the Western Self (Gunew, 1994). Said's posing of the mysterious other of the Orient can be extended to the romantic others of the Pacific to conceptualize how they have been constructed in palagi discourse. Asserting that 'what is commonly circulated...is not "truth" but representations' (Said, 1978: 21), Said highlights similar issues of misrepresentations that Figiel addresses in her novels and which I explore in specific readings of her work.

The vastness of the Pacific Ocean and its relative distance from the centre of metropolitan Europe contributed significantly to an image of vast emptiness that bewildered the imperial mission's agenda of discovering and claiming the unknown southern continent, *Terra Australis Incognita*. Instead of a continental landmass, European imperialists found a vast ocean dotted with literally thousands of inhabited islands. The colonizing mission could only succeed where new places were discovered, mapped and claimed. The presence or absence of other peoples inhabiting the islands were acknowledged merely as part of the new landscape but not of the same species as the colonizers. There was therefore no clear-cut boundary between

the newly discovered physical terrain - the virgin land, and the human bodies and fauna and flora on that terrain. This facilitated a conviction about the Pacific and its virgin islands and islanders as one big expanse of empty space that was out there for possession. It is this image of emptiness that according to Taylor, 'expresses the European tendency to disregard the peoples of the Pacific, to consider them as relatively unimportant and no obstacle to the (re)settlement of the lands they inhabited' (Taylor in Maidment, 1998: 189).

Another image that persisted in narratives of European discourse about the Pacific concerned the availability and sexuality of the female bodies inhabiting the vast empty islands of the Pacific Ocean, particularly the Polynesian female body as it was first encountered in Tahiti. The conflation of the female body with the gendered landscape of exotic lands perpetuated an image of nature as a feminine terrain that must be claimed, settled, cultivated, controlled, and subjugated (McClintock, 1995: 30-1). Colonization of the land therefore went hand in hand with or was almost inseparable from colonization of the body, for it was believed that the native's land, culture and body were in a primitive state of nature that warranted the intervention of western civilization.

Representations of the Polynesian female body in western literary discourse on the Pacific thus operate alongside western historical narratives to perpetuate palagi perceptions of a particular Polynesian female body, which sometimes bear little or no relation to the real or authentic. Simultaneously, they raise questions, albeit with different answers, about Samoan knowledge of itself, provoking debate about the 'truth' of western knowledge about the other. As Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa puts it in 'The Truth of Lies':

Literary truth is one thing, historical truth another. But although it is full of lies – rather, because of this fact – literature recounts the history that the historians would not know how, or be able, to write because the deceptions, tricks, and exaggerations of narrative literature are used to express profound and unsettling truths which can only see the light of day in this oblique way (Llosa, cited in Borofsky, 2000: 9).

The epigraph by Bernard Smith opening this chapter illustrates this double-bind between literature and history, with images of an 'Arcadian Pacific', ingeniously

packed with conventionally feminine attributes, invoke that metaphor of 'an ocean of desire'. Indeed, it would have been difficult not to fantasize about the Tahitian Eve or the Polynesian goddess when presented in such literary fashion. The sexual connotations of a New Cytherea³ and Polynesian goddesses and nymphs in paradise disseminated in colonial texts about the Pacific contributed significantly to particular preconceptions of the female Polynesian body (Smith, 1985; Suali'i, 2001; Taouma, 1998; Pickens, 1999). As indicated in those texts, colonisation of distant, other lands is therefore considered synonymous with colonisation of the feminine body, for the cultural attributes of the *itupa vaivai* or 'weaker' sex⁴, like the unexplored, undeveloped character of virginal land, render the female body easier to dominate, subjugate and manipulate (McClintock, 1995: 24). The feminized features of the colonized land can then be re-created, re-presented and moulded to accommodate the political, economic and religious interests, sexual desires and aesthetic tastes of the coloniser. In other words, a feminine and feminised terrain makes it easier to generate an ideological platform for the colonizing mission of the imperial gaze (Spurr, 1993: 13-21).

The Polynesian female body thus becomes an apt vehicle for the project of colonisation and a powerful metaphor for the imaginary project of re-presenting the other. Literary discourse from biblical and classical antiquity from the Renaissance to Enlightenment and Romantic traditions exploit this metaphorical association between the female body, with its culturally-defined attributes of vulnerability, desirability and sensuality, and Nature (Merchant, 1980). The woman-nature connection is also part of that interrogation in the sense that the imperial/colonial projects subsume the two entities as one generic 'female' body linked by gendered attributes to the contest for power and domination (Jordanova, 1986). In the discourse of European discovery and colonisation of other lands, the significance of gender is noteworthy in the concept of the Polynesian female body as a viable contested site for empire and imperial activities (McClintock, 1997: 26-7). This metaphorical association of the female body with the gendered territory of colonised lands is transposed onto the colonizing

³ Bougainville's name for Tahiti, calling it the 'La Nouvelle Cythere' in reference to a mythical island in Greek mythology.

⁴ Samoan terminology for woman or female, based on essentialist notions of gender: *itu* – side, category, part; *vaivai* – weak, fragile, delicate.

mission in the Pacific and contributes significantly to the production of images of the Polynesian female body which sustain the myths of paradise.

Early perceptions of the Polynesian female body were therefore closely related to how Europeans viewed far-distant peoples and distant lands:

The Enlightenment was more aware (than the Renaissance) of the New World's otherness and needed to define it as exotic...so it replaced the symbolics of monsters and Wonders with the concept of the Noble Savage...early notions of Paradise were related to tropical island utopias of the Hellenistic age...in the eighteenth century, austral travel fiction...replaced two very ancient stories: one about a forbidding land inhabited by monsters, the other about a welcoming isle of bliss, a sort of earthly paradise (Fausett, 1995: 252).

The employment of gendered rhetoric as a metonymic link between virgin land and a virgin's body is an interesting one but certainly not a novel invention nor a unique feature of the high imperialism rampant in the Pacific from the eighteenth century. In the discourse of colonialism from the times of Vespucci and Columbus, such metaphorical associations, according to Louis Montrose, can be drawn from similar phrasings such as 'opening up virgin territory' or 'taming the amoral and anarchic lives of the savages' or even 'censoring the unbridled sexuality of the women inhabiting a tempting and mysterious utopian world'. In a seminal analysis of gender in the discourse of discovery, he begins with an epigraph from Sir Walter Raleigh that reads: 'Guiana is a country that hath yet her maidenhead' (Montrose, 1991: 1). Montrose alludes to the allegorical personifications of America as a female nude with a feathered head-dress as illustrated in engravings of Vespucci's discovery of America, and describes similar representations as

an oscillation between fascination and repulsion, likeness and strangeness, desires to destroy and to assimilate the other; an oscillation between the confirmation and the subversion of familiar values, beliefs, and perceptual norms (1991: 2).

Michel de Certeau reflects in a similar vein on the gendered act of discovery and conquest of the other:

The conqueror will write the body of the other and trace there his own history...what is really initiated here is a colonization of the body by a discourse of power...This is writing that conquers. It will use the New World as if it were a blank, "savage" page on which Western desire will be written (Certeau, cited in Montrose, 1991: 6).

The body of the Polynesian other becomes the signifier of that 'blank, "savage" page' on which 'Western desire' is written and read through the eyes of colonial discourse. Just as De Certeau and Montrose describe, the images of the Polynesian female body that have been portrayed in western narratives of colonial discourse reflect its vulnerability as a textual and colonised terrain as it is bounded by inscriptions of gender and patriarchal power that silences and homogenises.

This gendering of the 'imperial unknown' is also critically examined by Anne McClintock who analyses the way European men applied or attached feminine attributes to their work such as feminizing borders and boundaries by giving them feminine names; planting female figures; or calling unknown lands 'virgin territory': As European men crossed the dangerous thresholds of their known worlds, they ritualistically feminized borders and boundaries. Female figures were planted like fetishes at the ambiguous points of contact, at the borders and orifices of the *contest*⁵ zone. Sailors bound wooden female figures to their ships' prows and baptized their mermaids and sirens. (McClintock, 1995: 24)

Given a core ecofeminist precept that the domination of women and the colonisation of nature are fundamentally connected (MacCormack, 1980), I argue that the same can be said in the case of the Polynesian body in its corporeal feminine form of land, ocean and woman. This is possible through a metonymic transference of gendered attributes of femininity from the material corporeality of the natural world (the Pacific Ocean or Island) to that of the anatomical female body and vice versa. The duality of woman and nature is evident in the cross-attribution of feminine qualities captured splendidly by Carol MacCormack:

In the eighteenth century, nature was that aspect of the world which had been revealed through scientific scrutiny to have its predictable laws, but also that which was not yet

⁵ my italics

mastered. Women were the repository of 'natural laws' and 'natural morality', but also that which was emotional and passionate. (MacCormack, 1980: 6).

This association of woman and nature serves to justify the subordination of both categories in the personal, political, and intellectual spheres (Maurice and Jean Bloch in MacCormack, 1980). In the discourse of colonial representations, this translates into a dialectic of gender attribution of the qualities of the female other – of untamed passions, unlimited sexuality and unrestrained nudity – assigned to popular images of the Polynesian female body. It is these images that are constructed in western discourse and re-constructed in continuing palagi narratives on the Pacific Islands within a generic metaphor that applies to not only the Tahitian female body as the original site of application but also to others (Teaiwa, 1994), and in particular the Saman female body. Teaiwa describes the concept that arises from this contextual application of the metaphor as the 'generic female body' – a body 'that emphasizes femaleness and implies heterosexuality over and above any other specificity of social identity' (1994: 93).

2. TEXTUAL FRAMES FOR EVE, VENUS, AND THE NOBLE SAVAGE[SS]

Long before the major European powers competed in the geopolitics of exploring, discovering, naming, categorising and colonising the islands of the Pacific, John Milton had already established the parameters for imperialism and colonialism in the greatest epic of discovery, possession and fatal impact ever attempted in English literary discourse. The biblical trope of a prelapsarian paradise in the Garden of Eden and the fallen state of that paradise in a postlapsarian context in Milton's *Paradise Lost* can be read as a fictionalised foreshadowing of the realpolitik of European exploration, discovery and colonisation of the Pacific in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The utopian view of Paradise glimpsed by Satan as he contemplates the beauty of God's creation is literally and metaphorically re-enacted in the discourses of travel and romance writing on the Pacific which were inspired in turn by the journals of European explorers and scientists like Bougainville, Wallis, Banks, Cook. It is the empirical and ethnographic accounts by these vanguards of European imperialism

which more than any other fomented a fanatical European fixation with certain perceptions, views or images of the Polynesian female body. It is a perception faintly reminiscent of Satan's first view of Eve in *Paradise Lost*:

Shee as a veil down to the slender waist
Her unadorned golden tresses wore
Dishevell'd, but in wanton ringlets wav'd
As the Vine curls her tendrils, which impli'd
Subjection, but requir'd with gentle sway...
...Nor those mysterious parts were then conceal'd,
Then was not guilty shame, dishonest shame
Of nature's works, honour dishonourable... (1V: 304-14).

Milton's epic can be read as a Renaissance travelogue celebrating the ostentatious grandeur of discovery, possession and settlement or colonisation of a heavenly paradise (Evans, 1996). The carefully crafted images of amoral sexuality associated with Eve's 'slender waist', 'wanton ringlets', 'impli'd subjection', 'gently sway' and 'mysterious parts' which were all 'nature's works' became commonplace constructions in later discourse on the Pacific and the Polynesian female body in particular.

Satan's first sighting of Eden and the sensual embodiment of its female occupant are symbolically recaptured in the records, observations and narratives of explorers, scientists, and travellers writing on the Pacific, who, as agents of the imperial mission, captivated the European public with an evocative view of utopia in the Pacific - a sexualised view which in turn aroused the voyeuristic instincts of western writers into satisfying the growing fascination of western readers with the idealized, eroticized and exoticized Polynesian female body. That is to say, these agents are credited not just for exposing the Polynesian female body to the Eurocentric gaze. They are primarily responsible for proliferating mythical and romanticised images of the Polynesian female body through the lenses of a colonial gaze (Smith, 1985).

Milton's poetics in *Paradise Lost* invoke and direct attention to the imperial trope of colonialism and the images associated with the discovery and possession of a *body*, be it a physical entity of land or a human form (Pickens, 1999). Metaphorically, the

Garden of Eden and the persona of Eve become feminised manifestations of colonised female bodies. Eden and Eve anticipate the ways in which the Polynesian female body will be constructed as an object of love, beauty and desire. This conflation of Eden and Eve is replicated in western historical narratives to promote palagi perceptions of a particular female body that bears little or no relation to the authentic bodies of Polynesian/Samoan women as they are depicted by Polynesian writers such as Figiel.

The discovery of the Pacific in the late eighteenth century thus becomes the occasion for unleashing pre-existent images of the erotic other, the nubile/noble *savagess* living in earthly paradise. Subsequently, when Banks and Bougainville titillated the minds and imaginations of the European public with erotic and exotic images of the Polynesian female bodies inhabiting the lush virginal isles of the Pacific, they were inadvertently appropriating a strategy that had informed imperial and colonial representations of the other since the discovery of the New World. Typically, Bougainville's account of his first encounter with the Polynesian female body provides an interesting perspective on the erotic and exotic allusions associated with the images of Paradise:

The verdure *charmed* our eyes, and the coconut-palms everywhere *offered* us their *fruits* and their shade in glades *adorned* with flowers, while the thousands of birds *fluttering* about the shore *revealed* that there were plenty of fish (Bougainville, cited in Ross, 1978: 114).⁶

The italicised words indicate the highly suggestive and sensual context in which the body of land is 'offered', 'revealed' and 'adorned' by the discourse of discovery. The femininity of native flora and fauna is reflected in the invocation of evocative images framed within the male gaze of explorers. In the discourse of exploration and colonization, public imagination is easily aroused when descriptions of verdure that 'charmed' and the 'fluttering' of 'thousands of birds' trigger colonial desire for the exotic and erotic, recalling Mary Louise Pratt's reference to the image of the body as the 'garden' of Eve plundered and possessed in the colonial quest (Pratt, 1992). This image pre-figures and personifies the feminine body of Cythera, birth place of Aphrodite, the goddess of Love, whose *verdure* or abundance *charms* the eye and titillates the senses with an *offering* of fruit that is as symbolic of Eve tempting Adam

in the Garden of Eden as it is with the free-loving maidens of Tahiti tempting the Europeans with their bodies. These maidens have no inhibitions in 'showing willingly all the perfections of a beautiful body (by displaying) all that was most enticing to win over the hearts of the newcomers' (Bougainville cited in Ross, 1978: 116).

The sensual connotations of the italicised words suggests a sensually soothing atmosphere to create a mood of wanton abandon and carefree charms. This romantic view is then followed by a closer scrutiny of the imperial gaze as it descends in a leisurely way and lovingly rests on a canoe of females who have crossed the beach in a canoe, in a symbolic voyage of exploration of their own, as if to claim for themselves the terms of this first encounter. These nubile bodies are:

...nearly all young, pretty and graceful and extremely friendly. Small rush hats covered their fine heads, shielding their light brown faces. Their eyes were velvety and their teeth of extreme whiteness...most of them were almost naked; ... the sailors were much excited at the sight of these well-proportioned goddesses, whose figures had not been spoiled by years of discomfort (Bougainville, cited in Ross, 1978: 116).

Invoking classical forms and standards of female beauty, the writer ascribes to the Tahitian female bodies a catalogue of western ideals for good looks: the young age of these maidens who are sexualised and categorized as 'young', 'pretty', 'graceful', with 'fine heads', 'light' brown faces, 'velvety eyes'; they are 'well-proportioned' and 'naked goddesses'. Descriptions like these evoke exotic images of young virginal maidens offering themselves to the 'gods' of the western world. Agency is theirs in these early years of contact, but they are powerless to resist or renounce the western gaze. The nubile nymphs are constructed *almost* but *not quite* to resemble their European counterparts in form and figure, alluding to a common neo-classical ancestry and corroborated by their light skin, extremely white teeth and well-proportioned bodies like the goddesses of Greek mythology. The exotic allure of the bodies is further captured in the captivating velvety eyes, a sexually-charged trope packed with symbolic meaning that signifies the sensual feel of velvet as tactile and visually lush (Pearson in Mallon, 2002: 187).

⁶ My italics.

Further on, there is a real blurring of fact and fiction, literary truth and historical truth in an account of the first physical encounter with the Tahitians. This is a first-hand glimpse of a 'commercial' transaction between a female Polynesian body and the male European body, an incident that violates all the codes of puritanical beliefs and Enlightenment morality:

A rug was brought to the spot, on which a young girl sat; signs from all the Indians made it clear what was expected of us. However, so contrary was this behaviour to what we were accustomed to that, to be reassured, one of us approached the proffered "victim" and gave her a false pearl, which he attached to her ear, and risked a kiss, which was returned with fervour.

A bold hand, guided by love...slipped as if by chance over breasts still hidden by a veil, which was soon removed by the girl herself, whom we now saw clad in the only clothes worn by Eve before her sin. She did more.

She stretched herself out on the mat and struck the chest of her aggressor and made it clear that she was offering herself to him and spread apart the two obstacles which prevent the entrance into that temple to which so many sacrifice their days (Bougainville, cited in Ross, 1978: 117).

In what can only be described as a brilliant piece of poetic prose, the young Polynesian female invites the gaze of the palagi or heaven bursters upon her naked body, revealing what natives or islanders consider to be that most tabooed and most erotic symbol of female sexuality. The double standard of sexual morality is cleverly masked in the circumlocution of the naked body as 'clad in the only clothes worn by Eve before her sin'. The interchangeable roles of 'victim' and 'aggressor' is used ironically here to subvert and reverse the power inscriptions of colonial discourse on the Polynesian female body, for it almost seems as if the girl is more of the aggressor while the man is the victim. In this case, the young girl exercises a certain degree of agency by offering her body in a provocative parody of the colonialist project symbolic of the commercial exploitation of the native land/native body.

Eve's body assumes the metonymic form of the feminised Polynesian female body opened for colonisation in return for the privilege of possessing the superior materiality of the coloniser's culture, a 'false pearl'. This ritual transaction is

performed in the 'silent unspoken' space of the 'contact zone' (Pratt, 1992: 7), a space or place of colonial encounters which foregrounds the unstable and unbalanced relations of power between coloniser and colonised. The allegory of the contact zone is amply demonstrated by the audacious and 'bold' conduct of the coloniser/'aggressor' who will cheat, violate, and defile his way to assume the *missionary position* on top of the willing body were it not in public. From the narrator's perspective, she is the one who surrenders power and authority to her 'aggressor' with the naivete and blind trust of a child of nature. The nonchalant yet 'bold' gesture of the hand on her breasts demonstrates the imperious manner in which he inadvertently claims possession of the feminine body/land. The final stage of complete possession and ownership is the anticipated entry to the temple but he hesitates, for with fifty Indians looking on, he is too much of an Enlightened man to take up the offer.

The actual irony of this scene is that the young girl is both 'victim' and 'initiator' in this paradoxical polemic of colonial discourse. She is depicted as 'proffered victim' and at the same time imbued with the agency to demand attention on her terms. The invitation for sex can be read in several ways. From a native perspective, I would argue that it is a ritual of gratitude or hospitality performed on special occasions and for special people, and the arrival of the cloud-bursters merits such a sacrificial offering. It is the native body which has 'crossed the beach' (Denning, 1980). The initiative is hers as she boldly negotiates a subject position with her nubile body. This only serves to perpetuate in western eyes an image of the Polynesian female body as an object of sexual desire.

The eye of the journal writer above scrutinises the young girl's body in a similar way but employs subjective language in much the same style that a landscape artist or painter or a novelist would use to describe or paint a landscape: itself a classic trope - from 'top to toe' catalogue: moving from top to bottom or part to part or from general to specific; the gaze travels slowly and seductively from the general environment and surroundings of utopian paradise to the crowd of Indians looming around to focus on the figure of a young girl lowering herself on a rug, to her ear on which a pearl has been attached, to her willing mouth which has returned a kiss 'with fervour' on down to her breasts and finally the erotic sight of her clad only in the 'clothes worn by Eve',

a witty substitution for total nudity. The provocative cataloguing of feminine attributes climaxes in the final destination of the travelling gaze, a vision of the inner temple, her vagina. The sense of sacredness and spirituality of the female body as an object of worship is manifested in the lyrical expression of contact with the other. Passages like these, inserted into what were supposedly empirical accounts, were typical of scientific and exploratory narratives on the Pacific and did as much if not more than visual art forms to perpetuate the myth of a sexual paradise.

If Bougainville's journals generated a fetishized fascination with the erotic body of the Polynesian beauty, the journals of Cook and Banks made their own significant contributions to colonialist constructions of that body. In fact, they made some subtle yet noticeable variations to the form and figure of the body idealized by Bougainville. Banks and Cook went further than Bougainville in constructing the female body not just as a thing of beauty and an object of love/sex but also as a specimen of scientific interest (Smith, 1985). Both men recognized the full potential of the female Polynesian body in the colonizing project. But while Banks, like Bougainville, extols the erotic virtues and attributes of the Tahitian women (Smith, 1985), Cook can only gaze at them with the detached eye of the scientific observer who sees the female body as an object of study.

Consequently, we gain a better insight into the apparent complexities of the Polynesian female body as Cook describes some of the customs pertaining to the women, such as women waiting on their men, being tattooed and performing the ritual of scarification as a sign of mourning for the loss of a husband (Beaglehole, 1934). The stark polarity of the images of sexualised bodies and scarified ones suggests the ambivalence of cultural representations by the British explorers of the female body, for while the body is celebrated as a temple of love, by the same token it is seen as a commodity that can be colonised not just sexually but culturally. We see through Cook's ethnographic gaze however that the Polynesian female is not just a vehicle or object of sexual or aesthetic pleasure as earlier narratives constructed them, but active agents of cultural relations. Cook's description of Oberea, for example, differs dramatically from other accounts:

This Woman is about 40 years of Age and like most of the other Women very Masculine. She is head or Chief of her own Family or Tribe but to all appearance, hath no authority over the rest of the Inhabitants whatever she might have had when the Dolphin was here (Beaglehole, 1934: 39).

The figure of the “Dolphin’s Queen”⁷ as Cook calls her is all the more imposing in marked contrast to the lithe young bodies in Bougainville’s journals. Her chiefly status justifies a more dignified portrayal that comes close to investing her with the agency of a leader that contradicts the stereotype of a passive female body. Furthermore, Cook’s representation of Oberea as very masculine offers a stark contrast to the nubile and lithesome bodies described by Bougainville or Banks, whose accounts of the Polynesian female body highlight the fanatical fixation of palagi discourse with sex and the female body, a one-sided perspective that occludes a deeper understanding of the native female other from a native perspective. In fact, Denning’s depiction of Queen Oberea in *Mr Bligh’s Bad Language* portrays a native body scandalised and satirised in the English imagination:

...because she had, it is said, a tattooed bum, because she had orchestrated a public copulation, because she watched while a young girl danced naked before Banks, and she slept with Banks while he had his clothes stole (1992: 265).

Denning ascribes agency and ambivalence to the historical figure of Oberea, for while she does not conform to the model of the Polynesian nymph or maiden, Oberea’s body is close to the ignoble paradigm for the ignoble marks of tattoo on her ‘bum’ and the lascivious spectacle of a public copulation that she organizes for Captain Cook and his men (Beaglehole, 1934). Literary discourse on the Polynesian/Tahitian/Samoan female body towards the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century becomes increasingly preoccupied with conflating images of noble and ignoble bodies such as Oberea’s, whose aura of sexuality is celebrated at the same time as her ignoble body is titillated in satirical representations that mock, humour or challenge the male gaze (Denning, 1992).

⁷ So-called through her personal association with Wallis who had visited and befriended Oberea in 1767.

3. THE LOSS OF INNOCENCE

Due to the popularity of travel and exploratory narratives in Europe in the nineteenth century, popular conceptions of the Polynesian female body as vehicles of unbridled sexuality continued to titillate the European mind, but with an added change in representation that is more subtle yet still perceptible. While the female body of the late eighteenth century demonstrated a vitality and vigour in cross cultural contact with the white man, by the middle of the nineteenth century, a certain disillusionment with the ills of industrial society led to a sense of nostalgia for a return to a natural state of existence such as that of the noble savage in paradise. This utopian view of paradise as a desirable form of existence for Man is based on the writings of French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau who laments the false existence of civilization and yearns for the ideal life in Utopia (Taylor in Maidment, 1998: 194). Such a view of life in its natural state necessitated a belief in the Polynesian female body as something to be preserved from decay and corruption. The writings of Melville and the impressionistic art of Gauguin did much to reinforce and sustain these images. In *Typee*, Melville develops with cunning artistic detail his first sight of Typee natives by engaging literary tropes of an edenic or paradisaal garden:

What furtive and anxious glances we cast into those dim-looking shades!...we descried a number of the trees, the native name of which is "annuee", and which bear a most delicious fruit....no ambrosia could have been more delicious...we moved on slowly, my companion in advance casting glances under the trees on either side, until all at once I saw him recoil, as if stung by an adder...I quickly approached him and caught a glimpse of two figures partly hidden by the dense foliage; they were standing close together, and were perfectly motionless.

They were a boy and a girl, slender and graceful, and completely naked, with the exception of a slight girdle of bark, from which depended at opposite points two of the russet leaves of the bread-fruit tree (Melville, 1893: 86).

The narrator and his companion are both embodiments of Satan in the form of a snake casting 'furtive and anxious glances' lest they be 'seen' approaching Paradise. The Typee boy and girl in their nakedness and motionless-ness typify the universal figures of Adam and Eve 'discovered' and 'disturbed' within the sanctuary of Nature. The

sense of motionless-ness freezes these figures in place so that the metaphor becomes easily transferable across time and space and henceforth captured in a timeless state of Innocence. Further on in the narrative, Melville's depiction of his native female companion Fayaway invokes the sexual connotations associated with images of the female body as nubile nymph:

I must accept the beauteous nymph Fayaway...Her free pliant figure was the very perfection of female grace and beauty. Her complexion was a rich and mantling olive, and when watching the glow upon her cheeks I could almost swear that beneath the transparent medium there lurked the blushes of a faint vermillion. The face of this girl was a rounded oval, and each feature as perfectly formed as the heart or imagination of man could desire. Her full lips, when parted with a smile, disclosed teeth of a dazzling whiteness; and when her rosy mouth opened with a burst of merriment, they looked like the milk-white sees of the 'atta', a fruit of the valley, which, when cleft in twain, shows them reposing in rows on either side, imbedded in the red and juicy pulp...Fayaway...for the most part clung to the primitive and summer garb of Eden. (Melville, 1893: 135).

Repeatedly referring to Fayaway as 'this nymph of the valley', Melville draws upon Western aesthetics to present a female body that reflects European constructions of the female other, an exotic female body who resides in Eden, wears the garb of Eve and has all the features of a western Self: a model of 'female grace and beauty', the face 'a rounded oval' and blushing 'a faint vermillion, teeth of a 'dazzling whiteness', hair flowing in 'natural ringlets' which hide 'from view 'her lovely bosom'. This apparition in Melville's imaginative history of the Typees is, furthermore blessed with 'strange blue eyes' which beam 'like stars' when it becomes animated with some 'lively emotion'. Despite the fantastical attributes of Fayaway's Grecian beauty, the narrator is not moved profoundly enough to develop a serious relationship with her. His interest is skin-deep, pertaining only to the ethnological and voyeuristic nature of observation. He merely employs an Outsider gaze to disclose the female body in the service of the colonial project of knowing and imagining the other. The other is merely a reflection, in terms of Said's orientalizing, of the Eurocentric self. From the above passage, Fayaway resembles more a palagi body with fair skin and blue eyes than a Marquesan beauty in a state of nature.

In Gauguin's case, the proliferation of his images of Tahitian women are more profound and probably more effective in the visual sense in perpetuating the myth of the Polynesian female body as an 'erotic playground' (Pickens, 1999). A post impressionist and symbolist painter, Eugene Henri Paul Gauguin sought the solace of a simple savage's life in Tahiti to escape the ills of his own society. Mathews asserts that 'What is fascinating about Gauguin's life on Tahiti is that the realities of the situation differed from his representation of them in his art and writings' (Mathews, 2001: 148). Calling Gauguin a 'sexual tourist' (148), she describes the nature of his art:

...his desire to place his erotic adventures at the center of his representation of the South Seas...directly fed what he knew would be the unacknowledged hunger of the European audience for a fantasy world of unfamiliar sexual sensations. Thus he did not merely suggest, as most artists and writers did, that these 'primitive' people practiced an unselfconscious nudity and open sexuality: he showed practices that were often perverse and painful, yet strangely beautiful (148).

Mathews reiterates the point made earlier by Llosa in 'The Truth of Lies'. Given the explicit erotic and exotic imagery of the Polynesian female body in Gauguin's literary and artistic work, this can be interpreted as another instance of the problematic intersections of the 'deceptions, tricks and exaggerations' behind western representations of the other. Taylor also makes the significant revelation about Gauguin that parallels Mathews' views concerning Gauguin's art: 'the paintings, of passive women, sunlit landscapes, fruit and flowers, resemble Rousseau's natural paradise and the island of love described by the early explorers' (Taylor in Maidment, 195). More complicated and fraught with powerful but covert undertones of Western hegemonic constructions of the Polynesian female body is Gauguin's painting of his young wife titled 'The Spirit of the Dead Watches'. As Gauguin explains:

I want to do a chaste picture, and above all render the native mentality and traditional characterWhat can a nude Kanaka girl be doing on her bed in a rather risqué pose such as this?...the inference is that she has had intercourse, which also suggests something indecent (Gauguin, cited in Andersen, 1971: 82-3).

On a conceptual level, this points to what Gayatri Spivak has suggested as part of the colonizer's efforts to create a self-image, by constructing the colonized as the self-contradictory other according to the terms of the coloniser's 'narcissistic self-image' (Spivak, 1996). It is an image which depends for the self-affirmation of its own existence on the presence of what Edward Said calls the other (Said, 1978), whose bodily and mental endowments or lack thereof, serve as a symbolic reminder to the self of its own presence in the order of things – a presence which prefigures the other's deficiencies and the self's proficiencies.

Within this paradigm therefore, the Polynesian female body is constructed as an image of 'colonial desire' in which the 'exchange of looks between the native and the settler' structures their relations in 'the paranoid fantasy of boundless possession' (Bhabha, 1994: 44). Bhabha's conceptualisation of desire between the native other and the settler can be applied to the Polynesian female body as a site of this negotiation of desire. In the context of sexual images of the female other, colonial desire is manifested in the way those images are constructed and represented in colonial discourse. The other has the body and the sexuality but lacks the refinement and the means for control possessed by the self. Without the body of the native other however, the western self would not realize the materialization or visualisation of its dreams or desires.

It is not surprising therefore that the European public should have formed certain perceptions of the Polynesian female body with the kind of romantic imaginings manifest in colonialist representations of the body of the Polynesian woman. The idyllic scenes of earthly paradise and utopian existence became a generic metaphor for a feminised landscape and female body for other Polynesian islands, thereby sustaining common misconceptions and images that served the overall purposes and politics of colonial discourse. Bougainville's lyrical accounts powered the imagination with statements such as 'They recognize no other god save Love. Every day is consecrated to him, and the whole island is his temple' or 'The women are meet rivals of the Georgians in beauty; they are sisters of the Graces, and entirely without clothing' or 'Here the lot of the women is sweet idleness and the art of pleasing is their most serious occupation' (Bougainville in Ross, 1978: 118-125). Couched in such narcissistic language, these terms of reference further consolidated the stereotype

of a sexualised Polynesian body skilled and generous in the art of love, a myth that was later to be appropriated by Margaret Mead for the Samoan female body.

The measure of the dramatic impact of such amorous portrayals of Tahitian women can be gauged from the fact that Tahiti and other islands of Polynesia swiftly became the hub of European or Western imperialism. The interests of the European public became increasingly directed to the exotic tropics in a spirit of imperial and voyeuristic adventure to appropriate the myths with the realities of the Polynesian female body. As a gendered body of land inhabited by nymphs and goddesses of Love, Tahiti became the 'the colourful centre of the eye of the Pacific, the gaze ...that was feminine... [in which] Europe found its heterosexual other' (Edmond, 1997: 29). The Tahitian female body became the paradigm for imagining and representing other Polynesian female bodies, in particular the Samoan female body.

As European presence in the Pacific continued into the nineteenth century, the nature of cultural encounters became more violent and with it came an overtly noticeable change in European constructions of the Polynesian female body (Smith, 1985). Smith observes how earlier conceptions of the noble savage(ss) associated with the idea of the soft primitivism of neo-classical and deistic thought slowly began to be replaced with that of the ignoble savage. The novelty of the exotic body of the noble savage(ss), according to Smith, began to wear off (but not completely disappear) from popular imagination in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as agents of the colonial enterprise attempted to construct women's bodies in images more closely resembling their religious ideologies (in the case of missionaries) or political ideologies (in the case of colonial officials). I argue however that the reproduction, construction and representation of the noble and ignoble paradigms existed alongside each other as concurrently generated images, with the noble savage(ss) paradigm dominating but not entirely replacing the ignoble.

The realities of daily life in the contact zone of uneven power relations made the nature of those relations between native and colonial bodies strained and simmering under the surface of assumed native submissiveness. Atrocities and other violent encounters committed by both sides of the contact zones were always noted in exploratory narratives but more often than not ended up camouflaged or subordinated

by the more attractive poetics of the genres of romantic literature. Nevertheless, it is still possible to discern a tentative development of the ignoble savage(ss) body from the journals of explorers like Samuel Wallis, La Perouse, Tobias Furneaux and Cook for example, missionaries such as John Williams and writers such as Stevenson and Jack London (Edmond, 1997). This re-construction of the Polynesian female body was diametrically opposed to Bougainville's Eve as it focused more on the uninhibited passions and body of the uncivilized and ignoble savage(ss). Just as Cook's Oberea resembles more of an ignoble female body as described above, the construction of the Maori female bodies also demonstrated that double-bind of noble and ignoble elements perhaps as an indirect result of the massacre of Captain Furneaux and his men. Kathryn Rountree notes that Maori women's bodies were often depicted in negative terms following Cook's second and third voyages (Rountree, 2000). Similarly, the bodies of Melville's 'savages' in *Typee*, with the exception of Fayaway, are like Manichean bodies whose every word, gesture or action is construed by Melville as fraught with the immanence of violence always lurking behind their seeming innocence. Melville's fiction presented an idyllic island 'in which the golden world of Rousseau's simple humanity and the dark shadows of the Gothic novel – romanticism's two extremes – would both have their place (Woodcock in Melville, 1973: 24). Although Tommo is enamoured of the ideal body of Fayaway and the erotic body of Typee culture, he is simultaneously anxious to escape what he fears are the cannibalistic appetites of his native hosts. The discovery of what he concludes to be skulls manifests that undercurrent preoccupation with the assumed ignoble element of the native body.

The missionaries however, more than the explorers, are perhaps most responsible for inscribing on the bodies of Polynesian women the most significant transformation in terms of the noble/ignoble paradigm. As the most visible, personal and erotic site of colonial enterprise, the body of the Polynesian female became a religious and secular target for missionaries seeking to save it from the moral degradations of prostitution, illicit sex and immoral behaviour. The missionaries considered the female body more of an ignoble terrain of sexual licentiousness than an innocent object of colonial desire. Native female bodies underwent subtle character portrayals with their idyllic bodies being depicted as somehow debased by sexual licentiousness, corrupted by greed and desire for a palagi lifestyle yet still possessing the body beautiful capable of

seducing even the most die-hard missionary. The missionaries soon discovered however that the Samoan female body was indeed a cultural enigma – delighting in personal body adornment, slightly more intractable in spirit yet enjoying a greater status than women from other islands:

the ladies think as much of themselves as ladies more sumptuously attired in our native country do. The females however are by no means as careful about concealing their persons as the men...If a person should jeer a young woman as she might be passing by remarking freely on her person saying she was diseased or ill formed she would instantly throw off her cloth and expose herself in ever possible direction and pass on...the females do not appear to be in a state of oppression as they formerly were at Tahiti and some other islands. They appear to be held high in the estimation of their lords...Adultery I was informed was of a very rare occurrence among them and that in many cases it was punished with death (Williams, 1984: 230-1).

The Samoan female body in the journals of John Williams is an active text of cultural agency who crosses boundaries when threatened or challenged but whose ‘lascivious habits’ make it a potential site for religious and extreme cultural intervention.

Williams further on describes how a woman accused of adultery was initially sentenced to death but later banished or exiled back to Tutuila. This kind of cultural intervention on the Samoan female body will be one of the thematic concerns in Figiel’s novels as her characters negotiate multiple identities within the active contact zones of life in modern Samoan society.

Another instance of the ambivalence arising from the intersection of noble and ignoble images on the Samoan female body is highlighted in the proliferation of images of the Samoan female body in photographs. In *Picturing Paradise: Colonial Photography of Samoa, 1875 to 1925* (1995), essays by Peter Mesenholler and Alison Devine Nordstrom give critical insight into the way that the thousands of photographs taken in Samoa at the turn of the twentieth century contributed significantly to the perpetuation of images and ideas about Samoa that confirmed or emphasized western self-interests and endeavours and at the same time confirmed a narrow range of stereotypes about the Samoan female body (Blanton, 1995). I refer to the photograph of “Samoa Princess Fa’ane” (71) to illustrate my point about the power of the image to convey certain ideas about the other: The female body is identified in the text as Faamusami, Princess of Samoa (von Reiche in Blanton, 1995: 70). The body is garbed

in the ceremonial garments befitting a princess or taupou and poses in a seductive and passive stance that emphasizes a sense of motionlessness and thereby timelessness. While her exposed breasts confirm the image of sexual compliance and her status as taupou or princess reinforces the appeal of her virginity, the ceremonial headpiece of human hair that crowns her head and the club in her hand present an ironic juxtaposition that enhances an ambivalent image of ignoble savage with undercurrents of savagery intersecting with the soft primitivism of the noble savage(ss) (Messenholler in Blanton, 47). Two other photographs (46-7) show taupous in similar ceremonial dress and each holding a large knife or club. Once these images were disseminated and entrenched in people's minds, several things happened:

new popular ideas about Samoa were no longer necessary once the place had been sufficiently defined, categorized, and brought under control by the West. Indeed, newer images might contest the alterity upon which the perfectly workable earlier images had been built (Nordstrom in Blanton, 1995: 15).

Acknowledging the tremendous impact of photographs and postcards in image constructions of Samoans by the West, both Nordstrom and Mesenholler attribute the success of Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* to the power of the visual images to stir the imagination of the European mind. Figiel's novels, I argue, provide a set of counter images that liberate the Samoan female body from the controlling gaze of the West.

4. THE AMBIVALENCE OF THE HYBRID FEMALE BODY

As a result of the noble/ignoble bind, the Polynesian female body begins to assume an ambivalent hybridity that reflects the *almost* but *not quite* nature of postcontact identity that eventually becomes fully developed and rounded in Figiel's literature. The character of Uma in 'The Beach at Faleasa' (Stevenson, 1996) personifies such a body. Uma's background reveals a hybrid body raised by a mother whose fate it was to be married to an alcoholic white man who has died, leaving them stranded on Faleasa and at the mercy of the unscrupulous white trader Case. Although she has no

say in her mock marriage to a palagi, she is a willing partner to the arranged marriage. Her previous sexual indiscretions with a native lover and a white trader become the occasion for a taboo being put in place on the business and property of her palagi husband Wiltshire. Her arranged marriage to Wiltshire is swiftly condemned by the village missionary and re-enacts the commodification of the female body as an object of exchange conducted for the mutual benefit and profit of those involved in the transaction. In that respect, it can be said that Uma's mother benefits from the 'wealth' of her daughter's palagi husband; Case, the white trader revels in the collapse of Wiltshire's copra business; and Uma herself enjoys the envy and prestige of being married to a palagi; while Wiltshire is content with the sexual favours and domestic skills of his young wife. The story ends with a decisive degree of agency exercised by Uma to transform Wiltshire - in the literal sense of his 'going native'. Wiltshire's reflections on his daughters' futures nevertheless reflects the predictable stance of the palagi perspective regarding the Polynesian female body:

What bothers me is the girls. They're only half-castes, of course; I know that as well as you do, and there's nobody thinks less of half-castes than I do; but they're mine, and about all I've got. I can't reconcile my mind to their taking up with Kanakas, and I'd like to know where I'm to find the whites (1996, 71).

Writing in Samoa in the late nineteenth century, Stevenson's portrayal of Uma is in line with prior palagi representations of the Polynesian female body - as a colonising tool, to be either concealed and venerated or revealed and violated. The irony of looking at the female body the way Wiltshire does above is that his views on Kanakas and half-castes are premised on an attitude that the female body, native or half-caste, is either an object of commercial exchange or an entity for sex and procreation. Uma is portrayed as a simple native woman steeped in superstition and lucky enough to have married a white man, whose fondness for his wife still underlies a certain attitude of patronising:

As for the old lady, you know her as well as I do. She's only the one fault. If you don't keep the eye lifting she would give away the roof of the station. Well, it seems it's only natural in Kanakas. She's turned a powerful big woman now, and could throw a London bobby over her shoulder. But that's natural in Kanakas too, and there's no manner of doubt she's an A 1 wife (1996, 71).

Stevenson's portrayal of Uma embroiled in the commercial and sexual politics of the 'contact zone' demonstrates that the sexuality of the female body still remained a major factor in constructing an image of a Polynesian maiden of mythical strength who is not only fertile in procreation but also very generous in giving, for she would 'give away the roof of the station'. Uma's personal traits are interpreted by Wiltshire as 'natural in Kanakas' and deemed by him as unnecessary and extravagant but ironically reveals him as being influenced by an individualistic perspective on life in comparison to his native wife. Uma's generosity reflects that community-based approach to life, which Figiel, I argue, presents in all its manifestations within the cultural framework of her female bodies.

5. PARADISE REVISITED

By the end of the twentieth century, native and palagi bodies had been engaged as active participants in the 'contact zone' yet palagi representations of the Polynesian female body remained on the whole consistent with stereotypical images related to the sexual desirability and availability of the female body. Writers like Robert Louis Stevenson injected a slightly wider perspective and a little more life to the character of the native female body but on the whole, constructions of the Polynesian female body centered almost entirely on the more popular paradigm of paradise in a 'pacific Pacific' and all related ideas were associated with the concept of paradise. It is this paradigm which, according to critics of Margaret Mead, provided a contextual framework for Mead's study on adolescents in Samoa (Freeman, 1999).⁸ Published in 1928 under the title *Coming of Age in Samoa*, the book made claims about the sexual freedom and promiscuity of the Samoan female body that were challenged by the Samoans, who considered Mead's claims about the sexuality of the Samoan female body as unfounded and defamatory. Perhaps to understand how, despite attempts by

⁸ The most notable critic being Derek Freeman (1983, 1999); see also Isaia (1999), Vaa (2000), Nordstrom (in Blanton, ed. 1995). According to Freeman, Mead was very much influenced by earlier narratives on and studies of the South Seas, in particular writers like Herman Melville (1892) and Edward S. Handy (1972), whose writings generated stereotypical images of a generic native female body engaged in wanton sex and casual relationships in tropical paradise.

Samoans to refute Mead's claims about their sexuality as contrary to the ethics and morals of the faaSamoa, Mead's book was so widely accepted as doxa on the sexual behaviour of the Samoan female body, one would need to see it, as Taylor suggests above, in light of the above analysis of the nature of images to influence people's minds. According to Taylor,

it can be argued that both the research and its reception, by both academic and general readers, were influenced by the old images of the Pacific societies as simple and sexually free, The terms in which Mead describes Samoa do suggest that she had been influenced, perhaps unknowingly, by earlier images (Taylor in Maidment, 1992: 197).

As a romanticised and mythicized narrative on life in Samoa, Mead's book opens with a powerfully romantic setting of a typical village in paradise awakening from a night of 'heavenly delights':

As the dawn begins to fall among the soft brown roofs and the slender palm trees stand out against a colourless, gleaming sea, lovers slip home from trysts beneath the palm trees or in the shadow of beached canoes, that the light may find each sleeper in his appointed place (Mead, 1963: 18).

It is a curious strategy of narration for an ethnographic text, for it employs the emotive and descriptive aspects of language normally reserved for romantic fiction. The intent is to first of all arouse the reader's imagination with erotic images of 'maidens' and 'lovers' making out with unhurried abandon under 'slender palm trees' or in the 'shadow of beached canoes'. The seeming casualness of these romantic encounters is enhanced by the deliberate choice of words like 'slip home from trysts', for these are not your usual American teenager's fumbling or groping kind of making-out in the back seat of a Cadillac. Rather, these are beautiful brown-skinned maidens and their lovers engaged in games or 'trysts' of love, with no inhibitions and no worries about curfews set by parents, for as long as it takes the dawn to break, there is no hurry, one can just slip back to one's 'appointed place'. One gets the impression that everything is 'appointed' or approved by society, that it is acceptable and quite within cultural norms to 'slip' back and forth between one's 'soft brown roofed' hut and the beach to indulge one's sexual fantasy. The idea of a 'colourless, gleaming sea' against which all this is happening is a subtle metaphor for the

universality of sexuality in the colourless sea of humanity rather than in the blue warm waters of the Pacific Ocean. Mead seems to be making an evocative play here for the sensual visualisation of romantic paradise. It is an appeal to embrace a philosophy of life and of living as it has been nurtured, cultivated and constructed in other *palagi* inventions of the others.

The whole array of sexualised images is skilfully appropriated to enhance idyllic visions of others. After capturing the reader's attention with a romantic construction of sexually provocative images, Mead then proceeds with the rest of the text, a comprehensive analysis of life and relationships in a typical Samoan village. It is a lengthy narrative of ethnographic details, but it has been guaranteed to sustain readership, for the highly erotic passages of the first few pages have created and sustained the interest and desire of the reader to explore and investigate further this whole new way of idyllic life.

Mead's literary skills in composition, polished and refined through an undergraduate major in English, are utilised with artistry and precision as she discloses 'proof' of the existence and reality of a romantic paradise in the South Seas hitherto celebrated in western literary traditions, but never until now tested within the paradigmatic framework of scientific inquiry. She interjects ethnographic narrative with allusions to the amorous nature of Samoan adolescents, such as this passage:

Sometimes sleep will not descend upon the village until long past midnight; then at last there is only the mellow thunder of the reef and the whisper of lovers, as the village rests until dawn (Mead, 1943: 23).

The imagery is heavily loaded with romantic or sensualised prose for maximum impact. This is given further graphic visualisation by making reference to Samoan girls' habit of deferring marriage 'through as many years of casual lovemaking as possible' (157); or even by implying that everyone is involved in this amoral environment of casual sex except for mothers and heads of families who have too many responsibilities to have 'much time for casual amorous adventures' (162).

The huge success of Mead's text and the universal proliferation of images of the Samoan female body as a contact zone, a site and space of free love, gives credence to the notion of the female body as an 'affirmation of a colonial gaze' (Teaiwa, 1994: 92). While Teresia Teaiwa may be writing about the nuclear impact of the bikini-clad body in Micronesia, the underlying parallel can also be drawn here for the way Europeans or palagis perceived the Samoan women through the colonial gaze. Teaiwa identifies a metaphorical alliance between the 'bikini's seminudity' and 'conceptions of the neoclassical and the South Sea noble savage that began in the eighteenth-century European imagination', an association of sexual allusions which 'conveniently marginalized' the Micronesia, Polynesian or Samoan female body (Teaiwa, 1994: 92). Freeman's refutations of Mead's claims about Samoan sexuality has complicated the issue of who has the right to represent or talk about the other. In presenting an opposing image of the Samoan female body, Freeman has positioned it at the opposite end of the Mead paradigm, creating a void or vacuum of unspoken and voiceless bodies of the Western imagination. Rod Edmond attempts to fill the vacuum by advocating for European representations of the other (female) body to avoid homogenizing tendencies that freeze the native into voiceless and powerless bodies of colonial desire (1997).

Spanning three centuries, European views or visions of the Polynesian female body have shown remarkable resilience in surviving intact, unchanged and unchallenged. In fact, the noble/ignoble paradigm has taken on a new persona as it were in terms of the Mead/Freeman debate still premised on the colonial constructions of otherness. While Mead's sexual paradise exalts the noble savage(ss) body, Freeman's Samoa extols the ignoble. The emergence of a postcolonial Pacific literature in the seventies, however, promises to be a liberating tool for the native female body. Indigenous writers such as Epeli Hau'ofa, Albert Wendt, John Pule, Haumani Kay-Trask and Sia Figiel to name a few are united in utilising the tools of oral literature, cultural traditions and western narrative forms to reclaim agency and authority for the female body and by so doing they succeed in exploding the noble/ignoble paradigm out of existence, or at least western literary discourse. In other words, they have set out in their creative fictions to demystify the various myths associated with the female body in Polynesia and so fashion it into a form which can 'express profound and unsettling truths' based on native understandings of such a body. Ultimately, it is only by

utilising what Llosa calls the 'deceptions, tricks and exaggerations of narrative literature' that these writers can only hope to achieve what up to now has proved to be almost impossible for Pacific politicians and academics to achieve – convincing the Euroamerican mind that they have the native body, especially the Samoan female body, 'completely wrong' (Interview, 2002).

In the next Chapter, I begin the task of unravelling the images of the Samoan body from the perspective of a Samoan writer whose characters provide invaluable insight that reveals a more authentic representation of the Samoan female body as it was in the past, as it exists in the present and as it aspires to be in the future. Figiel's portrayal of Samoan women in her novels offers a form of liberation from the homogenizing representations of the Pacific/Polynesian/Samoan female body in colonial and postcolonial discourse and, as I shall illustrate, in contemporary Samoan cultural discourse. I adopt an essentialist cultural perspective to analyse selected passages in textual and contextual frames of reference.

CHAPTER 2: THE FEMALE BODY FROM INSIDE-OUT

Figiel de-romanticises the past for both Samoans and non-Samoans. While recalling powerful female goddesses, she does not lose sight of the present nor of the strength and power of present-day women.

Deconstructing stereotypes of Samoan women as solely exotic, erotic sexual beings or domestic slaves, Figiel presents complex characters in a complex society that could be any society (Marsh, 1997: 7).

‘There are no wrong answers in Art,’ said Miss Cunningham.

‘You should express whatever you’re feeling at the time you paint or draw or scribble,’ she told us.

The boys and all of us girls were confused with this philosophy. How could something not be wrong, we asked ourselves? Our right-wrong world was questioned then for the first time, and we tried as hard as we could to justify our own beliefs. In doing this, we came to the conclusion that it was Miss Cunningham who was making mistakes, not us.... some of us intentionally drew clouds, and when Miss Cunningham asked us what they were, we told her they were trees...did she really think we were *that* dumb and did not deserve the truth? Or that we did not even deserve love? After all, love meant guidelines and rules and punishment. Miss Cunningham’s Art meant no guidelines, no rules, and especially no punishment (Figiel, 1996a: 165-6).

I choose the above epigraphs to begin a literary analysis of the way Figiel represents the Samoan female body within the context of cross-cultural encounters in the microcosm that is Samoa, or more specifically, Malaefou. Setting aside the gentle and familiar humour arising from the typical pranks played by students on unsuspecting Peace Corps volunteers struggling to negotiate cultural and linguistic boundaries of language in the classroom, Alofa’s opinion of ‘Miss Cunningham’s Art’ reveals a

polarity between Samoan and palagi philosophies on life. While Miss Cunningham tries to teach western knowledge and skills to a skeptical classroom of native boys and girls, Alofa struggles with her peers to 'justify (their) own beliefs' in the face of a palagi epistemology that challenged the validity of Samoan ways of understanding the world.

In this Chapter, I examine the female body as a site of and strategy for re-construction to be *manipulated* not just for the purely aesthetic project related to the genre but also for the more daunting task of 'writing back'. What I mean by 'writing back' is that Figiel uses the Samoan female body to address and challenge misrepresentations of Samoa and particularly Samoan women and at the same time raise awareness of issues that affect the status and position of Samoan girls and women in contemporary society. That is to say, Figiel writes back against palagi and Samoan conceptions of the Samoan female body. An understanding of what it means to be a Samoan female body is therefore essential for an appreciation of the way in which Figiel 'writes back' against received notions about it in contemporary palagi and Samoan society.

A distinct Samoan ideology of the female body guided and guarded social relations within family and village communities from precontact times to the present. It is an ideology framed by cultural prescriptions for formal and informal relationships and sanctioned by a complex system of behaviours and beliefs masked by an outward appearance of simplicity, hospitality and decorum. It is something that few palagi have been able to capture in their narratives and that perhaps only a Samoan can recognize, for it is contextual knowledge that cannot be gleaned from a historical, anthropological or romantic narrative. Trinh Minh-Ha affirms this when she suggests in *Woman, Native, Other* that outsider can not reach the 'marrow' or essence of the native (1989), for no matter how hard the palagi observer tries, it is impossible for people other than the native him or herself and those few palagi who take the risk of "going native" to understand or rationalise the ethos of native life. A classic re-enactment of this can be seen in the epigraph above, where young Alofa is frustrated with her palagi teacher's insistence that 'whatever they [do is] right'. This philosophy clearly makes no sense to Alofa and her peers, but they are obligated to humour Miss Cunningham, for she symbolises the superior palagi culture and she is a figure of authority. The mask of docility assumed by the class is, however, a façade for the

students to reverse the gaze – it is the hapless Peace Corp teacher who is now the victim of a prank usually played by locals against inquisitive palagi observers such as Margaret Mead (Freeman, 1999). As Tim O'Meara points out:

Samoans are known for their elaborate social and political etiquette. Because of this politeness, they are sometimes thought to be a serene and easygoing people. The elaborate etiquette is designed, however, primarily to prevent slights or political confrontations (1990: 35).

Figiel exposes this elaborate etiquette of social relations in the classroom. It is Miss Cunningham, not the native, who is now the metonymic extension of western stereotypes of the “dumb native”. Her frustration with her students betrays her lack of cultural understanding of Samoan ways of knowing and a failure to grasp what Trinh calls the ‘marrow of native life’.

A better understanding of native ideas about the female body can be found in Samoan oral traditions, including songs, chants, myths and legends; in postcolonial literature by Samoan writers and artists like Albert Wendt, Figiel and Momoe Malietoa von Reiche; and in academic narratives and literary discourse by Samoan intellectuals and academics⁹. The lack of written language in precontact times may mean that palagi standards for validity and reliability are not satisfied, but the power of native discourse to uncover Trinh's ‘marrow’ is more reliable than Mead's or Freeman's works. According to Samoan anthropologist Unasa Leulu Va'a, fagono or myths ‘may deal with weird characters and situations but hidden behind these are the existential truths of a society, not absolute truths, in an empirical sense, but the subjective truths which make up a people's ideology’ (Va'a, 2000: 16).

It is evident from analysis of ancient Samoan society as related in myths and legends (Va'a, 1978) and more importantly as depicted in Figiel's novels and still practised by

⁹ Such as Tuiatua Tupuola Efi, *Talanoaga na loma ma Ga'opo'a* (2000); Malama Meleisea, *Lagaga; A Short History of Western Samoa* (1987); Aiono Fanaafi, *Motuga'afa* (1996); Unasa Leulu Va'a, *Saili Matagi* (2001); Sina Vaai, *Literary Representations in Western Polynesia* (1999); Damon Salesa, *Troublesome Half-Castes: Tales of a Samoan Borderland* (1997); Melani Anae, *Fofoa-i-vao-ese: Identity Journeys of New Zealand-born Samoans* (1996); *Roles and Responsibilities of Some Samoan Men in Reproduction* 2000); Anna-Marie Tupuola, *Critical Analysis of Adolescent Development: a Samoan Women's Perspective* (1993); Penelope Schoeffel-Meleisea, *Daughters of Sina* (1978); and Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop, *Tamaitai Samoa* (1996,) among others.

Samoans, that Samoans value female beauty, female virginity and the female body (Williams, 1984)¹⁰. The archetypal figure of the traditional Samoan heroine in Samoan myth is usually named Sina and her body is venerated as a cultural marker of the status and prestige of her family. She is raised in a special way – perhaps kept away from the sun to preserve her light-coloured (whitish) skin and given light work around the house in the performance of her gender roles. Her physical beauty attracts the attention of male admirers but is jealously guarded by her brothers and parents. She is expected to be curvaceous rather than skinny, and to be skilled in preparing kava, weaving mats and dancing, and be gracious as a hostess. She is also heavily chaperoned to protect and preserve her virginity. The sacredness of her feagaiga¹¹ with her brother accords her with the native agency to exercise or make decisions in family affairs but also renders her body a sacred terrain marked with clear-cut sexual boundaries. Such is the lot of the taupou or village maiden, whose body epitomises that of Samoan women, for while not all can claim to be taupou¹², all are certainly expected to adhere to the same codes of morality according to the faaSamoa,¹³ a prescription which embodies harsh discipline when rules are broken and boundaries are crossed. It is this archetypal Samoan female body in its various manifestations which is both the subject and object of Figiel's fiction.

The Samoan female body becomes Figiel's medium of expression with which to return the palagi gaze. At the same time, it generates a discourse in which she can either challenge or promote the doxa of the faaSamoa, especially where it impacts on the cultural and personal identity of the contemporary Samoan woman. The following sections in this chapter expose the various ways in which Figiel writes back to received representations, stereotypical images and native ideas of the Samoan female.

¹⁰ In his journals, Williams describes Samoan women as more preoccupied with adorning themselves than with learning about the Word. See Moyle, R. M., *The Samoan Journals of John Williams*, Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1984.

¹¹ Samoan for covenant or contract, a relationship of mutual respect and reciprocity that binds partners or members to act with deference and compassion towards each other. See Va'a, op.cit.; see also Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea, *Daughters of Sina: A Study of Gender, Status and Power in Western Samoa*, 1979.

¹² In its formal sense, refers to the unmarried and virginal daughter of a high chief who has been invested with a title that carries with it certain duties and obligations which are performed and demonstrated in traditional protocol. The term is also applied in a generic sense to indicate the epitome of virtuous and upright conduct expected of young women.

¹³ This contradicts or refutes claims by some palagi observers like Mead that implies that virginity is expected only of taupous while for the majority of Samoan women, their sexual exploits is tolerated,

Issues of gender, agency, voice and style are all explored to reveal a side of Samoa rarely captured in books written by outsiders.

1. THE WO-MAN IN A MAN'S WORLD

Figiel's vision for a post-palagi Samoan female body in a hierarchical and patriarchal society is indeed possible given the ways in which Alofa (*Where we once belonged* and *They who do not grieve*), Samoana (*Girl in the Moon Circle*) and Malu (*They who do not grieve*) re-define themselves in relation to others. Figiel hints at this with her re-invention of Samoan myths that anticipate the important roles played by women in Samoan society. What is particularly significant in terms of the status of women is that Pili, the traditional progenitor of human-kind in Samoan mythology is demonised (Gabbard, 1998: 486), while Aolele, the mythical heroine featured in the first two novels, is valorized. That is to say, Figiel privileges the mythical female body in her legends as a way of validating the role and status of women in her fiction and by extension in Samoan society. To understand the status of the Samoan female body, one must appreciate the complex nature of gendered roles in Samoan society. Perhaps Tupua Tamasese Efi's comments can shed some light on the issue of gender and status in Samoan society:

The thing is that nobody ignores the reality that [women are] the real power in the village set-up. They build the churches, they build the schools – they carry the real clout...and any politician who ignores them ignores them at peril. I mean if you alienate them you're done for. And any matai who alienated his wife or the women fold in the village, well I would imagine he'd be a very impotent matai, well in a political social sense (cited in Liu, 1999: 198).

As the ones who 'carry the real clout', the role of the Samoan female body is versatile. In Samoan cosmology, the worth of a woman is measured in terms of her overall status as a valued member of the kin or aiga, her procreative role in society, her economic contribution through aualuma¹⁴ membership and her special relationship, her feagaiga, with her brother. While not all women can be wives, they

which is of course a gross fallacy, as any Samoan woman who has been brought up in the custom of the faaSamoa will affirm. See Anae, op.cit; Tupuola, op.cit.

are still embodied entities in the brother-sister paradigm, which accords them special privileges and rights. Efi's comments grasp that essence of the 'marrow' of the female native body. A comprehensive study by Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea, aptly called *Daughters of Sina*, provides a solid structuralist account of the value systems behind gender roles for Samoan women.¹⁵ I turn now to Meleisea's analysis as a contextual framework for analysing the status of Figiel's female characters:

Sisters were the most highly value status group in the village; they held and transmitted mana (sacred power) while brothers held pule (secular power). While all the daughters of the village were highly valued...wives were the lowest ranking adult status group in the village, the 'outsiders'...who were expected to serve their husband's family and his sisters, just as he did. A woman assumed subordinate status to her husband who, by the act of marriage, had conquered her sacredness and, by extension, that of the descent group whose esteem she represented...A wife had no rights in her husband's village, and, should the marriage break up, wives were expected to return to their natal village. Here, they resumed once more the status and rights of 'sisters' (Schoeffel, 1979: 173).

The special status enjoyed by women as sisters and mothers is not obvious to an outsider, who may read the above analysis of the married woman in confirmation of the palagi perspective that women are subordinate to men. Figiel's portrayal of the Samoan female body however illustrates the complex status of women in Samoan society in terms of gender.

The gender roles of the Samoan woman can best be understood as Samoan cultural constructions premised on totalising conceptions of gender based on genealogical attributes. That is to say, being born with male or female genitalia is the presiding cultural predicator for the role one is to play from birth as male or female (Suali'i, 2001). This biological essentialism in gender roles conforms to western categories of cultural feminism that privileges culture in gender roles, though in terms of Samoan society, gender is originally ascribed at birth and given cultural inscriptions to differentiate and distinguish male and female. It is a perspective that gives a double inflection to Simone de Beauvoir's famous assertion that 'One is not born, but becomes a woman'. From pre-adolescent to old age, the Samoan female body is

¹⁴ Village organization of unmarried women headed by faletua and tausi, wives of leading titled men.

marked by aga and amio appropriate to one's gender roles. That is to say, one is born a woman, but one also becomes a woman. In the case of the faafaige Sugar Shirley,¹⁵ however, Figiel presents an anomaly of gender construction which locates Samoan attitudes to the abject subject position of the faafaige. Sugar Shirley's insistence at being called a 'she' and not a 'he' and the evident tolerance of Malaefou for his self-imposed gender as faafaige demonstrates the liberal attitudes of traditional Samoan society towards those who 'lack' the biological category for sexual identity, for in this case, Sugar Shirley is not born but made a woman (Suali'i in Macpherson, 2001).

Gender roles for women in Samoa, therefore, with the exception of faafaige, are culturally determined by the biological corporeality of their bodies and recall the woman/nature link identified earlier (Merchant, 1980; Mercahnt, 1995; McClintock, 1995). This cultural association of women with nature is given poetic license by Alofa in *Where we once belonged* as she describes the mythological origin of earth and its first-born:

Tagaloa looked down and saw the growing trees and ordered Tuli his son to go kill them.

When Tuli reached the trees, he found a snake sleeping on a rock. Tuli woke the snake up and ordered the snake to eat all the trees. The snake obeyed Tuli; the snake was afraid of the birds. He ate all the trees. He ate all the grass.

And then Tuli flew down from a cloud and hit the snake with a club.

'I didn't tell you to eat the grass, you fucking snake'.

He hit and hit the snake...until the snake died, and turned into a pile of worms...and ta-gata was born...born out of gata...out of the beating of the snake...born out of Tuli's violence (Figiel, 1996a: 190).

This mythical account of the creation of man and woman writes back to palagi models of sex and gender and exemplifies Figiel's construct of herself as a 'womanist' whose subjectivity is located in the term itself: 'There's woman and there's man in that word...In the islands, how can we move forward as women if we can't reach out to our men as well at the same time?' (Interview, 2002). It is this spirit of complementarity, with the wo-man and man complementing each other's existence,

¹⁵ Other studies by Samoan female scholars such as Melani Anae (1998, 2000) and Anna-Marie Tupuola (1993) have added to the literature on Samoan women.

¹⁶ Samoan for transvestite from *fa'a* – like or in the manner of, and *fafige* – woman or female.

that informs gender roles in Samoa. While this may be true for women as sisters or mothers, it is quite a different story for women as wives.

When we analyze the status of women like Pisa and Lafi, we discover the imbalanced status of Samoan women who marry and move into their husbands' families.

Schoeffel's comments about the traditional status of a wife is illustrated below:

I treated her no differently from the way your grandfather's mother treated me. Some might call that cruelty. I call it handling a woman with dignity. For to have treated her any less would have removed any sense of respect your mother might have had for this family....

....She reminded me of myself....stepping foot into my mother-in-law's house terrified me.

[Pisa] did everything she was told in those days when silence was the only friend she had (Figiel, 2000: 139).

Tausi, Alofa's grandmother, is merely re-living ancient traditions that define the social obligations of women. Her role as Pisa's mother-in-law is a faithful reconstruction of the matriarchal figure of doom and despair dreaded by their daughters-in-law. The roles of the two women are clearly defined here, with Tausi asserting her traditional authority as the formidable mother-in-law while Pisa the dutiful daughter-in-law is obligated to bear Tausi's treatment of her in silence.

That which western feminists might categorise as 'cruelty' in terms of the subordination and devaluation of women (Schoeffel, 1979: 549) is seen by Tausi instead as 'handling a [wife] with dignity'. The metaphor 'mu ou maka i le afi' (Figiel, 1996a: 101) with its cultural connotations of serving the husband's family underlying the extreme subservience of Pisa's role – literally, burning one's face in making the fire, blowing the embers and keeping it burning until the meal is cooked and the husband's family are served first – aptly describes the traditional Samoan wife like Pisa treated as a second class member of the household in that regard, but also further demeaned by her origins – she hails from Savaii¹⁷, far removed from the centre of civilisation in Apia and therefore considered backwards. Her submission to Tausi's admonishment evokes the reader's sympathy. While Figiel may exaggerate Pisa's

submission for greater effect, the cultural inscription of gender roles for a Samoan wife is mimetically transcribed:

Fire. That's what she would have to spend the rest of her life, in the fire, next to the fire.

'Mu ou maka I le afi'.

'Burn your eyes in the fire'.

For that is what happened to any woman who eloped and lived with the man's aiga.

That is what happened to every woman who had to replace a wife or (in this case) wives.

She was compared constantly to the second wife...not to the first wife, as if the first wife never existed (Figiel, 1996a: 101).

Pisa's status as Filiga's third wife makes her situation in the Filiga household more precarious. Her age, her gullibility, and her innocence are pitched against the sexual prowess of a married man, leaving little doubt of the double standards of morality for men and women in Malaefou and, by extension, Samoan society. While she is made to suffer the indignities and humiliations of being a wife 'from Savaii', Filiga exercises his prerogative as a Samoan husband by unceremoniously sending his second wife Logo back to her village:

'I've taken a new wife,' said Filiga to the rest of the family, not looking at Logo. 'Tell the 'woman' to leave the house *today*. Leave the girls behind. Let her pack her things and leave. I don't want to see her in this house again. *Ever!* (1996a: 96)

Logo's older and abject body is no match for Pisa's youth and virginal body in the contest of wives, but while their bodies become cultural battlegrounds for the sexism of Samoan male sexuality, they are both subservient to the whims of husband and in-laws. Logo reveals this in her lament:

'Auoi ka fia ola!' she screamed. 'What have I done wrong? What is this all about? Tell me, Tausi! Have I ever failed to take care of you the way you are accustomed to? Have I ever failed to put food on your plate, wash your clothes, iron your clothes, praise you in public? (1996a: 96)

¹⁷ The biggest island in the Samoa group of Islands, where the effects of modern life are minimal in comparison to the main island of Upolu, a fact which stereotypes people from Savaii as from the bush or more native, lacking the sophistication of those living in Upolu.

Logo's abjection is intensified by the deliberate marking of her body: 'her pained skin, which she scratche[s] and scratche[s] with her own fingernails; her lovely hair, [which is] partly bald in the front' from "pull[ing] and pull[ing]" (1996a: 98). For all her suffering as a slighted wife, it is Pisa, not Filiga, that is the subject of her venomous tirade: 'I am going to kill her,' said Logo, 'I'm going to return the pain she's caused by ripping out her throat and baking her pig-body in a umu' (1996a: 98). Logo can be read here as a negation of Mead's claims that Samoan women do not feel jealousy. Logo's rage is later transferred to Pisa herself when she discovers that Mrs Samasoni's son looks too much like Filiga:

Filiga was there in Timu's face...

'Who is this body?' Pisa asked.

'He is my son,' replied [Mrs Samasoni].

Without warning, Pisa grabbed the Wind by her neck, kicking her in the stomach...kicking her some more. She sank her fingernails into the Wind's face, into her eyes (1996a: 201).

Beneath the violence of jilted wives lies an ironical tension created by the hypocritical morals of the Samoan husband like Filiga, whose sexual misconduct is condoned as an essence of the male ethos. His wives participate in this unwritten code of male sexuality by transferring their anger on each other.

Pisa's sense of failure as a wife leads her to consider giving birth to girls a 'curse' for they, like her, are cursed by culture to 'grow up to shame their aiga and to 'burn their eyes in the fire'. Through Alofa's stream-of-consciousness monologue, describing her struggle to survive in her mother's womb, we discover the depths of Pisa's despair when she first discovers she is pregnant:

she was cursed, just like her mother, to bear girls...This was the curse of girls. Girls would grow up and continue the cycle of being seduced by middle-aged men. Girls would grow up to shame their 'aiga and burn their eyes in the fire' (Figiel, 1996b: 104).

Her obsessive desire to bear Filiga a son draws attention to her concern not to repeat the cycle of being duped by men like Filiga and serving their families from the back. Girls like Alofa are therefore monitored and scrutinised closely by their families so as

not to fall into the same cycle. *Where we once belonged* and *Girl In the Moon Circle* describe the gender roles ascribed to girls such as Alofa, Samoana and their peers. Girls perform certain duties, functions and behaviours relevant and appropriate to their age and sex:

Never wear the same panty twice when you have the moon sickness.
 Never laugh at blind people or deaf people...or palagis.
 Never walk around alone at night – only bad girls and teine o le po walk around that late.
 Never wear anything exposing your knees.
 Never wear pants on the malae or at the pastor's house.
 Never wear high-heels.
 Never wear make-up.
 Never go to church without a hat.
 Never go bra-less to church.
 Never speak with the 'k' in your mouth
 'We' were young ladies, and 'we' should handle ourselves as such (Figiel, 1996a: 137).

This passage appears to be an allusion to Jamaica Kincaid's story 'Girl' from her *At the Bottom of the River* (1984) and reflects Figiel's resourcefulness in invoking and appropriating the textual narratives of other postcolonial writers so as to write back to western notions of gender constructions. One is not just born a woman in Samoan society but because of that, one is made a woman. Culture is a strong signifier for gendered bodies, as the litany above confirms. Figiel's fiction reproduces this essentialist foundation of gender roles and status ascribed and prescribed for the Samoan female body in all three novels. By the same token, she also satirises and challenges them by drawing out the double standards of behaviour which privileges men more than women. In *The Girl in the Moon Circle* ten year old Samoana explains the roles expected of young female bodies – social prescriptions on the female body that testify to that 'essence' of being a Samoan girl/woman:

Washing dishes. Wiping babies. Carrying our sisters on our hips. Carrying our brothers on our hips. Our cousins. Nephews. Nieces.
 We pick breadfruit leaves when we wake. Breadfruit leaves and mango leaves. Cigarette butts and beer bottles. Before we go to school. After we come back from school.
 When we giggle in church women stare at us with that I'm gonna get you when church is over stare. And we wait for it. For church that is to be over. So that we can rush out of our seats.

Only to know that we rushed in vain. And that our mothers had heard of our 'misconduct' from someone else's mother. And she would pull our hair and 'force her' to yell obscenities at us...

When we smile accidentally at someone our fathers beat us and cut our hair and call us shameless (1996b: 30).

Samoana's life revolves around a strictly supervised schedule of chores and a rigid code of behaviours shaped by cultural expectations of extreme modesty and obedience. The daily dose of disciplinary measures on Samoana and her friends constitute that faaSamoa discipline that is universally recognised by Samoan women. There are various ways, what Anae refers to as coping mechanisms (Anae, 1998), to cope with the constant surveillance on the body and one of these is to escape into the magical world of palagi culture:

Tagi's family was the first in Malaefou to get the power...

A week later they got the first TV in the whole district...

For me, Tagi's TV remains the most important event in my life. A milestone...

The excitement over Tagi's TV disappeared. Three months later. When Laugiu's got theirs...And everyone suddenly wanted to be Fiasili's friend...

Fiasili who bragged and bragged about every possession they owned (1996b: 21).

Samoana's admission about the personal significance of Tagi's TV can be understood in terms of the images of 'happy palagis driving around in their cars' and her naivety in accepting the commercials on TV as 'always true'; more importantly, the images of the 'palagi women especially' take on a satirical reversal of the palagi gaze on the Samoan female body, for she observes that they were:

So industrious! But not only that. They were happy. Joyous at the sight of work. Smiled at dirty dishes. Clapped at dirty clothes. Or floors.

Everytime you turned the TV on you saw them mop-dust-mop. Doing laundry.

Feeding their cats and dogs. Whenever do they stop? (1996b: 22)

It is a gaze reflecting on both the palagi and the Samoan female body, revealing not just the essentially similar gender constructions of the domestic roles performed by both, but the intercultural spaces of humour and satire from media-generated images of the palagi female body, which are juxtaposed with its Samoan counterpart: while

the palagi women 'mop-dust-mop', Samoana's jobs include 'washing dishes. Sweeping the floor. Stealing firewood' (23).

Even the severity or laxity of punishment discloses a form of gender construction, for girls receive a lighter punishment than boys. Consequently, Ivoga, being a girl, receives the hibiscus on her skinny legs while her brother Isaia merits a 'hard' blow with the hibiscus, while Samoana, who escapes the wrath of her mother, accounts for her lucky escape thus: 'knowing perhaps that she didn't beat me because I was the youngest'. Despite the discipline inflicted on young female bodies, they are still cherished and nurtured with the alofa or love of a parent. Their age proves to be a blessing, as their relative size and pliability affords them the opportunity to escape the heavier punishment meted to boys and older girls.

While Samoana's worldview is limited to the roles she plays as a ten year old female, the portrayal of Alofa as a typical Samoan girl experiencing the turbulence of adolescence demonstrates the impact of biological and cultural construction of gender roles in Samoan society. In *Where we once belonged*, Alofa, Moa and Lili perform daily chores and tasks within the family and village reserved for girls, such as cooking, weeding and learning to be 'good girls'. The social and cultural orientation of their bodies and minds into the faaSamoa way of life is a constant negotiation of personal and collective identity based on group norms from family, peers and other culturally significant bodies such as the minister's wife:

The pastor's faletua taught us girls how to sew, how to dress, how to behave. Whenever we didn't behave, she would pull our ears or pull our hair or slap our faces...no matter how tall we were, no matter how tall we became.

We were not allowed to laugh too much or too loudly.

We were taught to be meek.

We were taught to be humble, again (1996a: 137).

Samoan and Christian traditions form a hybrid space of cultural conformity, turning girls into meek and docile bodies which embody the sacredness of the bonds of feagaiga. The pervasive influence of the pastor's wife as an embodiment of Christian ideology is manifested in the full authority she enjoys in Samoan society as a disciplinarian. As keeper of the faith and guardian of the body, the pastor's wife

controls girls' aga and amio so that outwardly, the body is a docile terrain of bio power (Foucault, cited in McNay, 1992) while inwardly, it is a hotbed of rebellion. Foucault's notion of biopower includes the ever present possibility of resistance and this is what the Samoan female body, as it is portrayed by Figiel, is always trying to assert when it is out of the public gaze. When the three girls are away from the disciplining gaze of their family or community they are able to enjoy the agency of adolescent bodies by transgressing borders of amio and aga. Despite the almost constant scrutiny of their bodies under the collective eye of the 'We', Alofa and her friends are still able to find time and space to indulge their selves and their sexual desires.

While the gender roles of Samoan women remain more or less fixed by biological determinism and cultural and religious ideologies, there remains one anomaly of gender construction that must be addressed, and that is the abject body of the Sugar Shirley. Figiel admits to enjoying special relationships with faafafines as her Auntie Tanya, a well known faafafine, is the inspiration for Sugar Shirley. Sugar Shirley is born male but chooses to be *like a woman* in dress, mannerisms, speech and name. As an abject body in Malefou, she evokes irony and humour for her very public affection for a married man and the way in which she parades in the town of Apia dressed in women's clothes. Her abject position as other is a matter of contention with the wife of her lover but apart from the wife, 'No one dare[s] call her a him' (1996a: 53) until the day Eleele, out of jealousy, forgot that Sugar Shirley may have the aga and amio of a Samoan female body but still has the strength of a "him", and addressed him as 'Shirley boy'. Tamasailau Suali'i's insightful analysis of fa'afafines provides a Samoan contextualization for a cultural phenomenon that is increasingly being recognised as a distinctive gender identity (Suai'i in Macpherson, 2001: 169). Suai'i notes that faafafine are

indeed associated more with women than with men in Samoan society. Parents would not actively discourage their female children from forming platonic relationships with fa'afafine, as they pos[e] no public sexual threat (2001, 170).

Sugar Shirley's relationship with Alofa and her friends confirms Suai'i's remarks, for the whole village of Malaefou call her 'Sugar Shirley Girl'. The faafafine episode is

another site of ambivalence for Figiel whose comical depiction of Sugar Shirley as a female that is *almost but not quite* a woman reveals the complex attitudes of Samoans, towards sexual deviancy – an unspoken acknowledgment of perceived homosexuality in men such as Eleele's husband; a great tolerance for the abject sexuality of faafafine such as Sugar Shirley; but also a denunciation of sexual immorality if practised by women. It is a double standard that discriminates against women and that ultimately leads Alofa in *They who do not grieve* to reject the traditional heterosexual relationship offered by her artist boyfriend Apa.

2. VIRTUAL REALITY OR SOCIAL REALISM?

From Alofa in *Where we once belonged* to Samoana in *Girl in the Moon Circle* to Malu and Lalolagi in *they who do not grieve*, Figiel presents the female body as more than a passive 'text of culture'. The body is an active agent of embodied emotion that is culturally constructed as a 'practical, direct locus of social control', subject to 'external regulation, subjection, transformation, "improvement"' (Bardo in Conboy, 1997: 91), while at the same time seeking to negotiate a place and space within the social and cultural mediums of interpersonal contact with others in its search for self and cultural identity. In the context of traditional Samoan society, the female body enjoys a paradoxical position of restraint and respect which accords it fluid boundaries within which it can exercise individual agency. Figiel, along with Samoan author Albert Wendt, breaks new ground in Samoan literary tradition by giving voice and space to the experiences of the Samoan female body as an autonomous subject. Albert Wendt's *Ola* is another 'text' immersed in the modern contact zone of contemporary life as a Samoan woman. However, although Ola's life experiences are authentically grounded through a mimetic representation of the postmodern educated Samoan woman, the fact that her 'voice' is constructed by a male author lessens the impact, but not the imaginative power, of cultural meaning on the Samoan female body. As a Samoan woman, Figiel is more strategically placed than Wendt in terms of lived experience as a Samoan woman to authenticate in more depth the essence of being a Samoan woman raised in the faaSamoa. By conceding subjectivity

to her characters, Figiel creates for them a subversive strategy for agency and appropriation within the liminal spaces of contemporary Samoan society.

The concept of liminal or liminality which refers to the interstitial or threshold space, an in-between space where cultural change may occur, is an appropriate and useful term to apply in this context. In this sense, it is analogous to Pratt's contact zone – a region or space where there is continual engagement, contestation and appropriation of identities (Pratt, 1992). This strategy helps to develop and disclose the complex nature of the Samoan female body in moments of intense and sometimes painful self-reflection in the social reality of the faaSamoa. Fearless insistence on documenting aspects of Samoan life that may have been hidden in or obscured through popular palagi stereotypes and traditionalist beliefs is one of Figiel's fundamental strategies – a poignant, sometimes humorous and truthful representation of the grim realities of Samoan women's lives. The story of Sadness and Beauty in *They who do not grieve* can be read as a classic reconstruction of that reality. It is the story of Malu, whose body embodies the realities, the complexities and the truths about the Samoa female body.

Malu's unspoken acceptance of her body as a temple of spiritual and cosmological dimension begins with a mythic narrative about an allegorical couple called Sadness and Beauty who have a child called Grief who does not live happily ever after. Figiel re-invents the paradigm of a good story as Grandmother Tausi is fond of telling Malu:

If you wanna tell a sad story then tell a sad story. If you wanna tell a beautiful story then tell a beautiful story. Never say you're gonna tell a beautiful story and then end up repulsing people. Making people laugh when they should've been crying or crying when they should've been laughing. Don't mess like that with people's minds (Figiel, 2000: 11).

Malu's story turns out to be a history of sadness, beauty and grief. There is no romantic narrative of native bliss nor, except in dream mode, is there a happily-ever-after ending apart from the hint of hope in an unplanned pregnancy. Figiel explains the explicit and graphic violence in some episodes from the perspective of an insider:

I wanted to show a bizarre form of love that comes with abuse, that westerners may not understand and then misunderstand the book and say it's purely violent...I was really trying to create this psychology, this weird love...between the Grandmother and Malu...I try and hope that it comes across to the reader, that it's not just senseless violence. The violence is not done just for violence's sake, but that there's something behind the violence and it's Love in its many shapes and forms, and it's very complicated (Interview, 2002).

Despite her tragic family history and the daily dose of derogatory remarks about her mother and her body, twenty three year old Malu narrates her story as one who is acutely aware of her physical abnormalities and illegitimacy but who has nevertheless developed a strong sense of self. She adopts a peculiar mannerism to combat the harsh words of an abusive grandmother or ward off the intrusive gaze of palagi - a 'melancholic smile' that infuriates Lalolagi and fools the gullible Mrs Winterson. The smile is a mask that conceals what is really simmering under the skin of the body - a lived metaphor of personal and national history constructed from the *suifefiloi* of stories as narrated by Alofa, Samoana and Malu. Figiel presents a rationale premised on the cultural constructions of *feagaiga* between mother and daughter (or grandmother and grand-daughter) in which love, respect and duty form a paradoxical paradigm that powers the intriguing relationship between Malu and her grandmother Lalolagi. At twenty years of age, Malu's search for identity comes at a great price:

The despair in my voice is nothing new. It is old. As old as Grandmother. As old as the Wind eve...It is a despair that all the women in my family are plagued with...It is hidden in the smiles we show. ..In our voices. It surfaces in our happiest moments. And in our saddest it comes out as nothing more than grief....there is no cure for our despair (Figiel, 2000: 66).

Malu's poignant picture of the despair shared by 'all the women in this household' is metonymic of the situation of women like Pisa, Logo, Ina or Tupu. As strange as this may sound to those who have expressed unfavourable and negative comments about the violence in Figiel's novels, and especially in light of concerns raised in public debater about the alarming rates of child abuse in Samoan families, Figiel's sentiments have a certain 'truth' in them, for many Samoan female subjects raised in the *faaSamoa* would agree that love or *alofa* is what transcends the physicality or reality of the corporal punishment inflicted on the Samoan female body. The fact that they generally survive their *faaSamoa* upbringing and maintain close links with family

serves as an endorsement of Figiel's philosophy of love and validates the virtual reality of the Samoan female body in Figiel's fiction.

3. A SAMOAN WOMAN(IST)'S STYLE

Figiel's female protagonists assume an essentialist function for not just Samoan but all Pacific Island women who have previously been silenced, slandered or subdued by the interrogative gaze of western writers. In a manner that mirrors Susan Bordo's claims that the female body is a medium of and metaphor for culture, Figiel portrays her female characters and mythical heroines as embodied entities or actors of embodiment, manifesting through their thoughts, words, and actions an ideological conception of the body 'not merely as subject to external agency, but as simultaneously agents in [their] own world construction' (Lyon & Barbalet in Csordas, 1994: 48).

Embodiment is understood by Csordas as 'an existential condition in which the body is the subjective source or intersubjective ground of experience' (1994: 143). Figiel's female characters embody through their relations with others the whole array of authentic life experiences in the faaSamoa. These range from menstruation, abuse, abortion, sexual abuse, racial discrimination to village scandals, parental tyranny, diasporan displacement, sibling rivalry, and illicit and unrequited love.

The mimetic representation of the Samoan female body in Figiel's novels can therefore be taken as a convincing strategy that allows the author to interrogate several concerns. Firstly, it enables her to be frank and realistic about the restrictions, disciplines and violence experienced by Samoan women. Secondly, it provides her with the means to write back to Mead's version of a romanticised, conflict-free paradise, to Freeman's version of a suicidal and disturbed society and to earlier and older myths of an arcadian Pacific. Lastly, it helps her to break through the 'silencing' of women by and in the faaSamoa by appropriating the voice of the most gullible,

credible, and silenced female body, the Samoan adolescent girl, in order to expose and explore the 'marrow' of the faaSamoa.

The first aspect of this mode of representation involves Figiel's use of language, a strategy that highlights what African critic Ngugi wa Thiong'o refers to as that which is 'both a means of communication and a carrier of culture' (Ngugi, 1986: 13). Figiel's employment of Samoan and English as an experimental exercise in the agency of the female body to appropriate words in order to communicate and carry culture is facilitated by all the poetic and rhythmic qualities of the Samoan language. Figiel's readings of her novels as performance texts are no surprise indeed considering the way in which she exploits the narrative process to reflect her style of writing.

As a Samoan female body with a distinctively Samoan voice, Figiel incorporates the strategies of speaking and writing unique to a language steeped in oral traditions, story-telling and the complex nuances and meanings of a metaphorical discourse. It follows from this therefore that Figiel's appropriation of the Samoan female body in order to 'write back' to popular stereotypes of the Samoan female body discloses an essentially feminine articulation. Figiel's style of writing is consistent with the style of a Samoan woman(ist) or female body – loud, musical, repetitive, rhythmical, allusive and metaphorical. The Samoan language, that is, is 'Samoan theatre....There is colour, panoply, pageant, drama' (Tamasese, 1992: 2). It is characterised by 'oracular pronouncements, allusions, poetry, perverse nomenclature, deliberate ambiguity and doublespeak' (1992, 3). Figiel's use of language incorporates Tamasese's metaphor for the Samoan language as 'Samoa theatre' at its best'. She appropriates a highly emotive and figurative prose and verse which aims for the sound and sight of what Efi calls 'Samoa theatre'. As the first two works are written as performance pieces, this involves stylistic devices of sight and sound in which 'sentences are short/precise/simple but packed with images and metaphors (Figiel, 1996b: 121); the language has to have 'that energy' (ibid) characteristic of the way young female bodies speak and carry themselves as well as having the music and sound of the fagogo, verse and colloquial speech of the Samoa female body (ibid):

Lesi asked, 'Can I come with you?'

'For the last time, no!'

'Can I come with you?'

I combed my hair, rubbing Sione's hair-grease into my curls Come-comb....comb straight....making the hair go straight....making the hair look like Jill's hair on Charlie's Angels. I knew what they would say.

'O le fia Jill ia o lea mea ailalafa! Kope le seluga o ou fugu koeikiiki sau le pasi! Akoa le kausag o ku koeikiiki ka'e le kioaka!....

I closed my ears....closed my hair to the mumble-mumble (Figiel, 1996a: 34).

The use of phonological registers is crucial also in identifying the nuances and meaning of utterances, thus a passage of dialogue or narration may be interspersed with a mixture of Samoan and English to underline the blurred borders of contrasting images evoked. This is highly prevalent in *The Girl In The Moon Circle* where the language adopted for the ten year old narrator deliberately compromises fluency in English as a second language and is complemented by switching codes, a practice that entails the 'use of more than one language in the course of a single communicative episode' (Gordon and Williams, 1998: 75). Code-switching is a literary tool used by postcolonial writers, especially indigenous ones, to create discomfort for the palagi reader by 'confronting him or her with an apparently uncrossable cultural boundary. Figiel employs code-switching throughout, as Trinh Minh-Ha advocates (1991), as a deliberate strategy to 'negotiate the relations of privilege and exclusion, to challenge and subvert entrenched attitudes of dominance, and contest ascriptions of cultural values (Gordon and Williams, 1998: 77). She invites the insider's gaze and scrutiny while keeping out the gaze of the outsider who is denied the privilege of understanding the meaning and nuances of words in their Samoan context. In an ideological sense, Figiel is contesting the cultural and linguistic dominance of English as encoded in language, even where she chooses English as the primary medium of expression.

When it comes to the sensitive matter of swear words or those words associated with sex and sexuality, it is interesting to note Figiel's rationale when it comes to speaking or writing in one's mother tongue:

When you hear it in the mother tongue it's much more overwhelming, for example, in terms of swearing.....there's heavy swearing that didn't even exist or would not be even expected of a Samoan writer, especially like using the word 'motherfucker' in *They Who Do Not*

Grieve...If someone says that to me, me personally, it wouldn't affect me. But when someone says a Samoan swear word, I mean it gets me to the heart!...And also if we look at the strength of those words, my characters have to be strong enough to use those words without feeling guilt...I don't want to portray dainty ladies at lunch...I'm talking about women, people who struggle, and so the strength of them comes through in their dialogue as well (Interview, 2002).

This is a common sentiment among Samoans, who resort to profanity in the English language so as to avoid violating the *feagaiga* or *Va* between people. Always conscious of the *Va*, the sacred space between people bounded and bordered by cultural protocols for behaviour, Figiel resorts to 'foreign' signs to convey meaning: 'What is the meaning of this, motherfucker?' (Figiel, 2000: 54). This is another way in which Figiel appropriates the language of western discourse not only to challenge the dominance of the English language but also as a tool to neutralise Samoan sensitivities to issues that may be otherwise considered culturally inappropriate or *mataga ile faaSamoa*¹⁸. Ironically, Figiel's extensive use of profanity, even in English, has been the reason for some negative criticism of *Where We Once Belong*.¹⁹

The most significant aspect of style unique to Figiel's writing however is what she acknowledges as a *suifefiloi* style of writing (Interview, 2002; Marsh, 1997). Figiel adapts the term and the style to describe her textual strategy of combining strings or strands of stories 'sung' in readings or celebrated in written form. From the words *su'i* meaning stitch or sew, and *fefiloi*, meaning mix or combine, *suifefiloi* refers to the mix or medley of writing styles, narrative voices, and the litany of stories stitched by Figiel into one 'long long ula of *suifefiloi*' (Figiel, 1996b: 41) that embodies all of Malefou and connects everyone in her three novels. The ula or lei is a garland or necklace of flowers worn around the neck and is one of the most common and visible signs of adornment of the body, a cultural mark of celebration and on ceremony. Figiel consciously appropriates the ula *suifefiloi* in a highly original way, for the flowers she uses are a concoction of bright scented ones to celebrate love and laughter, and wilted or prickly ones to lament pain and grief. Alofa describes the

¹⁸ Behaviour or conduct demed offensive and reprehensible.

¹⁹ A private high school in Auckland with a high percentage of Pacific Islanders turned down Figiel's request to give a public reading of her book, but changed their mind soon after when Figiel won the Commonwealth Award for Best First Book. (Interview, 2002)

strategy of survival adopted by her classmates in response to the harsh discipline of their teacher Mrs Samasoni:

It was during such times that all the students of Standard Four C came together as if in a 'ula pua or ula teuila'. Our sorrow or fear were like flowers in the morning dew. We sewed our sorrow and fear into ula, and offered it to the victim for consolation (Figiel, 1996a: 163).

Mrs Samasoni's response to this collective offering is to 'release the tongues of three hibiscus' (1996a: 163) on Iona's legs to 'To see how far the 'ula could sustain itself, without withering away or breaking' (1996a: 163). In fact, I argue that the ula *suifefiloi* that Figiel weaves is potent enough to liberate Samoa female bodies from the captivity of a panoptican prison of disciplined bodies. The ula metaphor allows Figiel to weave or stitch together the lives and experiences of her female protagonists and reflects a holistic entity of life that celebrates the whole person in her totality. The *suifefiloi* is therefore a culturally appropriate strategy that strings all the memories and stories of the female body and links them in a circle of life. This circularity can be interpreted as a celebration of a holistic worldview which considers the body (beautiful) as a whole person, physically and psychologically and not just as a sum of its parts. When Grandma Faga remarks: 'That's how we keep our dead alive, Ana. Like a ula pua. A ula stitched around our memory. Permanently. One that is not ever broken' (Figiel, 1996: 104), she is invoking that essence of the ula pua as a celebratory symbol of life, worn by women to adorn as well as constituting a poetic ritual of affirmation of all that is beautiful about the Samoan female body. The ula can also be read as a symbol of the *feagaiga* or sacred bond of in the sense that an ula is offered as a token of love and friendship between two people (Salesa, 1997; Schoeffel, 1979; Shore, 1996). It is also from the pua tree that Ana's friend Tupu attempts to abort her pregnancy by repeatedly climbing up and jumping down (Figiel, 1996b: 108). The pua tree, with fragile flowers that wilt and branches that break easily, symbolizes the vulnerability of the female body which, like the pua flower itself, can be an emblem of beauty or simply a memory of 'our dead alive' in its wilted form. Tupu's nubile but violated body has wilted like the flowers of the pua tree when they are plucked from the tree and woven into an ula 'suifefiloi' and left worn or hanging from the thread of life for too long. The beautiful but wilted garland

or ula suifefiloi is a wonderful, bittersweet way of talking *back* to palagis and talking to Samoan society and encapsulates a metaphorical strategy of Figiel writing back.

Another way in which Figiel incorporates the concept of suifefiloi can be seen in the stringing together of different points of view, textual frames and varying time frames. In *Where we once belonged*, the reader is jostled back and forth between first and third person narration, beginning from the present when Alofa is thirteen years old and progressing back to her birth, forward to the present, back to her creation or conception, forward to the present then back to her parents and so on. In between these opposing narrative frames are various styles of text which serve to demonstrate Tupua Tamasese's assertions that the Samoan language is 'theatre' at its best. The style of theatre is here exemplified in novel form by Figiel with an infusion of drama and passion, death and dying, through a postmodern style of textual narrative, shifting points of view, poems, letters, songs and myths. This dramatic suifefiloi of styles serves as a literary reminder of the ambivalent and hybrid body of a Samoan female writer well versed in teasing or drawing out the nuances and meanings of an oral language like Samoan.

Figiel's representation of the Samoan female body is indeed close to what readers raised in the faaSamoa will identify with or relate to (Anae, 1998; Tupuola, 1993). Within the framework of a social realist form of representation, Figiel uses non-realist modes of writing and representations to complement her "womanist" project of liberating the Samoan girl/woman from the shackles of common stereotypes. That is to say, in order to foster a better understanding of the female body, Figiel adopts the genres of magic realism with its mixture of fantasy and reality, and social realism with its emphasis on real-life representations, to convey an authentic Samoan society (Durix, 1998).

4. MYTH, DREAM AND METAPHOR

On another plane, the strategy of speaking or writing in metaphor alluded to by Tamasese in his reflections in 'In Search of Meaning, Nuance and Metaphor' (Tamasese, 2002) is widely used and manifested in Figiel's fiction. The Samoan language is indeed noted for its rich metaphorical allusions, the meanings and nuances

of which are lost without an understanding of the context. Figiel employs metaphorical images drawn from the natural and cultural environment of Samoa extensively throughout the trilogy to create powerful signs and symbols. In *They who do not grieve*, these signs signify a magical realist mode of representation, combining the imaginary-mythical past in the forest of life with the realities of the present to produce a magnificent juxtaposition of the magical and the real as narrated through the eyes of an abject Malu. Malu's fantastical adventures in the forest of life centre on an imaginary romance with the flute man and culminates with Malu giving birth on the beach to a stillborn baby.

The birth is the climactic point of Malu's journey through the forest of life, the affirmation of her power to become her own person, her own body, even if it is 'papaya-shaped', dark-skinned as Midnight, with thighs 'as thick as ka'amu', a scarred face and teeth with a gap wide enough to 'dock a thousand ships'. This celebration of her body translates into an affirmation of a native ideology of feminine beauty:

I hugged my huge-dark body to myself. I ran my fingers through the beehive that was my fizzy hair. Circling my fingers in the space (the valley) that separated my breasts. The space, too, that connected my huge thighs ('Like tree trunks', village children and women and men teased). Caressing the bark of the trunk. The bark of the tree trunk (branching in two like a river split in half) where birds and bees and ants and other insects nested from the rain. But where tiny fish swam freely when the rain overflowed, turning red with every passing Moon. The one place that brought me infinite joy. That made me forget to breathe because of the scent that lived there. (A scent that was condemned publicly and privately because of the thickness of the musk that lived in it. A scent every girl and young woman was advised to wash away; lest it become offensive to people. A scent I kept drowning in because of its fertility. Its richness, Its reminder that I was woman. That a sacred red river ran there each time the Moon became full (2000: 53).

Figiel's strategy here of authenticating the native form of the authentic Samoan woman while simultaneously "exoticising" it poses an element of menace through mimicry (Bhabha, 1994: 86). According to Bhabha, the menace evolves from the double vision of the reader and subject, which, in disclosing the ambivalence of the female body, also disrupts the cultural frames of representation that had previously stereotyped and denied cultural value of that body. Malu's body is presented in a very

different framework defined by cultural forms specific to Samoan society. The gaze of the female narrator displaces the objectifying gaze of the all-seeing palagi male described earlier, while colonial desire shifts from the ideal palagi body to the ideal native body as perceived by Figiel. In this sense, Figiel is again challenging both palagi and contemporary Samoan perceptions of beauty by emphasizing the eroticism and exoticism of Malu's body.

Figiel therefore employs rich lyrical prose to convey an image of Malu's body as the embodiment of all that is sacred and profane in the faa-Samoa. The body becomes a metaphor for Mother Nature in the form of a tree, a life-provider and life-sustainer for birds, bees, ants and other insects; 'tiny fish' swim in the river of menstrual blood flowing down the barks of the tree trunk. There is a definitive sense of auto-eroticism with the suggestions of infinite joy experienced in the 'one place' where 'rain flowed, turning red'. Where papalagi bodies like Mrs Winterson exude the scent of artificial perfume, Malu rejoices in the intoxicating fragrance of her own body odours. Her body is the means through which she celebrates what appears to be a transgressive sexuality, delighting in the private joys of 'that place' and the sensual scent of it. The passage's eroticism derives from the association with Nature and Fertility and draws its erotic impact from the mythical connotations of the body with the wilderness and unbridled passions inherent in a state of nature (Merchant, 1980). In that sense, Figiel clearly appears to disrupt traditional paradigms of beauty from a Samoan and palagi points of view. Her descriptions of Malu's body conform more to a hybrid of the noble/ignoble paradigm and can be taken as another instance of the way Figiel 'writes back' to colonial and native discourse on the Samoan female body. The poetic force of such metaphorical constructions of the body creates an ambivalent tension in her allusion to Bougainville's Tahitian maiden. Once again, Figiel appropriates the strategies of earlier palagi representations of the Polynesian female body to mimic colonialist objectivity and the erotic gaze. Both depictions draw heavily on the use of natural imagery. However, while Bougainville exploits images from an arcadian setting, Figiel's relies on authentic landscape to re-appropriate constructs of those stereotypes for the purpose of liberating the Samoan female body from the constrictive frameworks of western images.

Native ideals of beauty as they are portrayed in myths and legends and in contemporary attitudes about female beauty are also challenged here, for Malu's body does not conform in any way with those standards. She has a 'huge dark body' the size and shape of a tree trunk, with beehive hair, thick taamu-thighs and a body scent that was 'publicly and privately condemned' for its strong musky odour. Figiel outlines her philosophy on the female body that inspires her:

My characters try to celebrate their bigness. They're not afraid to do that, because they grow up with big aunties...big grandmothers...I associate that bigness with warmth...and it also juxtaposes the western billboards that we see of these skinny palagi women (Interview, 2002).

Malu is confident of her own body and celebrates it in the silence of her mind. By associating her body with metaphors of Mother Nature and the motherly figures of those around her, she demonstrates a nativist re-affirmation of selfhood and identity grounded in a holistic approach to life that embraces the spirituality and value of everyone and everything in nature. Alofa, on the other hand, must compete with western ideals of the body which have filtered down to the contact zone or liminal spaces of Malaefou society via mass media and palagi culture. In *Where we once belonged*, Alofa and her friends are experiencing a stage in their teenage lives where they completely reject their native bodies for the 'Charlie's Angels' images on TV sets. This fixation and fascination with palagi bodies is an ironical twist in the discourse of colonial desire, for in this case, Figiel is re-appropriating the same strategies employed by the likes of Bougainville and Gauguin in order to present the palagi bodies on TV as exotic, erotic and different in the eyes of the native girls. It is a strategy that represents an ironic mode of 'writing back' that reverses the gaze, even as it ironises it.

Furthermore, the moon is developed as a trope for female sexuality. A visit by the moon means in biological terms that the female body has menstruated, which in the context of Samoan culture, signifies a rite of passage to womanhood. Alofa has ambivalent feelings about being visited by the moon – while she looks forward to it and resents the day her friend Moa announces that she has the 'moon sickness', she is also fearful in case the moon forgets to visit her, believing that 'Girls who didn't get it and lived would never find husbands', for 'No one wanted someone who was

forgotten by the moon (1996a: 117). When Lili becomes pregnant, Ana draws an analogy with 'when the eye of the water became clear' which is a literal translation of a Samoan proverb 'ua manino le mata ole vai'. The reflection of reality through clear water, as in a mirror reflecting the self, is Alofa's way of disclosing the ugly truth about who 'planted the lizard' in Lili's womb, while Eleele's unplanned pregnancy to Falefou becomes a 'bread baking in her oven'; Pisa's misery as a wife or *nofo-kage* in her husband's family can only be imagined thus: 'these early days were filled with tears, pools of them. One could practically go fishing in the pool of tears Pisa cried' (1996a, 105). Pisa's tears echo the tears of the mythical Apaula signifying the pain and suffering of a wife for her husband.²⁰

Figiel uses motifs drawn from the natural and mythical landscape of Samoa to enhance the magic-realism aspect of her narratives and to uncover the meanings embedded in the female form. For example, she frequently alludes to the Owl in dream time, to signify her inner self and the idea of warrior or mythical messenger associated with it. Another trope commonly used is that of the ocean, employed in all three works as a symbolic space of vastness and the universe of life, living and death associated with it. These images are echoed by Epeli Hau'ofa in his seminal essay 'Our Sea of Islands' (Hau'ofa, 1993). In advocating a new vision for the Pacific, Hau'ofa posits the ocean as a metaphor of nurturing, an interconnected space or place that connects people and cultures. In *They who do not grieve*, Auntie Ela finally reveals to Malu the significance of her birth and her circumstances surrounding her mother Mary's death:

They found her at sea. She was already dead. Floating on the sea like some goddess of myth or some sea creature. The men who found her said they couldn't tell she was dead because she looked so peaceful, floating there on the sea as if she were part of it. 'She was the sea,' one man said when they brought her to land (2000: 239).

Mary's death renders the ocean a metaphorical space of grief and despair, but it is also, as Malu's birth signifies, a symbol of hope and redemption. The ocean holds profound significance for Figiel in a historically personal and private sense, for as she discloses:

²⁰ According to myth, Apaula wept tears of sorrow upon returning from Fiji to find her husband Vaea had turned to stone.

I was born in the sea. That is my mother and my aunts were looking for *kuikui* when labour pains made themselves known. Which is why probably I embrace Epeli's idea of us being Oceanic people (Figiel, 1998: 93).

The fluidity associated with the ocean or sea is symptomatic of the circular logic of some native ways of thinking and knowing, which can also be extended to the metaphorical space of the female body as a vessel of Nature (Merchant, 1980). This serves to validate this gendered aspect of the vast Pacific Ocean in its symbolic function and structure. As a foetus, Alofa is graphically portrayed in an image of 'an ocean of immeasurable depths' (2000: 163) which threatens to drown her. In the cosmos of Pisa's femininity, Alofa's existence as a 'speck of dust in a corner of the universe that was (her) mother's womb' (ibid) is threatened by Pisa's desperate attempts at aborting her. The 'ocean of uncertainty' (164) that surrounds her life as an unborn renders her as vulnerable and susceptible to drowning within its blue waters, yet it is also a metaphorical place of possibilities with its vastness according her enough space to hold on to her 'corner of the universe' (163).

Figiel also weaves into the narrative structure meta-narratives of immense metaphorical magnitude. I refer here to the mythologizing aspect of her works in which she re-invents the myths and legends of creation, of the first man and first woman and the origin of the male (*tatau*) and female tattoo (*malu*) and Samoan belief systems such as the sacred *feagaiga* between brother (male) and sister (female). The myth of *Aolele* demonstrates the way in which Figiel incorporates elements of magic realism into a re-reconstruction of Samoan mythology that reflects and recreates the ambivalence and hybridity of the Samoan female body.

The story about the origin of the village *Malaefou* describes how *Tagaloagi*, supreme god of Samoan cosmology and creator of the universe, has a son named *Pili*, who uses the village *Malaefouapili* as it was then known, as his resting place in the Lower Heavens, or *Lalolagi*, the new gathering place where Earth gods met the gods of Heaven. The myth describes how *Laueleele* the Earth marries *Fe'e* the Octopus and how a daughter, *Aolele* (Wandering Cloud) is born to this union of Earth and *Fe'e*. The custom of cutting the umbilical cord or umbilicus of the female with bamboo and burying it under the mulberry tree is carried out in accordance with Alofa's gender, as

are the roles she plays: 'Aolele played under the mulberry tree and made siapo, too...and sewed songs like flowers, stringing one to another another' (1996a: 140).

What is significant in this myth in terms of the Samoan female body is that Figiel creates Aolele first, thereby giving woman priority over man. Gabbard questions Figiel's valorization of Aolele and 'demonizing' of Pili in a 'fictional invocation of legendary and mythological figures from Samoan cultural history' (Gabbard, 1998: 486). Given the critical role played by the legend of Pili in Samoa's oral history, I argue that Figiel deconstructs Christian and Samoan creation myths that privilege the patriarchal figures of Adam and Pili in order to prioritise the voice and bodies of women. Of great significance is the violence inflicted by Aolele's brothers on Pili when he tries to transgress sexual boundaries, for it anticipates the volatile nature of the feagaiga between brother and sister that continues to this day. Privileging the status of women in this manner foregrounds the importance of women but also hints at the violence that is born out of sexual transgressions. Following the birth of Aolele, Earth gives birth to seven sons called, in numerical order of creation, Tasi, Lua, Tolu, Fa, Lima, Ono, Fitu. And so begins the sacred feagaiga or covenant between brother and sister, male and female, that is to symbolise the bonds that interweave and interconnect the lives of Samoan women and men:

They were to be only for their sister, Aolele...thus the seven brothers guarded their sister not only with the strength of their bodies but also with their very souls, for she was to be the sky of their eyes, the source of their pride, their strength. They were to serve her until their souls were ready to leave their bodies for Pulotu. This was the feagaiga. This was the covenant between themselves and their sister. This was their duty (1996a: 141).

Pili's infatuation with Aolele is presented in metaphors and images drawn from the erotic and exotic landscape of nature specific to the Samoan context:

Aolele was incarnate beauty – her eyes darker than lama juice, her lips thick like oars from a war-canoe, her breasts firm like the heart of a tanoa, her teeth whiter than virgin siapo, her nose noble, experienced, pre-conditioned for greeting...and to take in all of a stranger's agaga...and to release it only if the stranger had honourable intentions. Her legs were strong too, like pou of a fale – feet that carried her from land to sea to inland to waterfalls to Malaefou, grounding her to her mother the Earth. Reaching for the Earth, too, was her hair...dark, dark hair that fell down her back. Like fern upon the bark of a tamaligi tree, embracing the tamaligi (141).

Figiel's description of Aolele parallels that of Malu –an impressive catalogue of beauty ideals and metaphors direct from the native fauna and flora of Samoa: 'lama juice', 'oars of a war canoe', 'tanoa' and 'virgin siapo' all enhance the Samoan-specific model body of Aolele. Rosanna Raymond presents an insightful comment on this kind of nativistic idealisation of the Samoan female body:

Figiel's description eloquently describes an older 'ideal'. The only other source from which we 'behold' such beauty today are found through digging up old proverbial sayings, songs, and legends from a time when we still listened to the clouds and the wind. When the body was not something to be feared, not something unnatural and dirty to be hidden, and weight and skin tone were symbols of power (Raymond in Mallon, 2002: 91).

This privileging of the ideal native body like Aolele's, as Raymond suggest, is a way for Figiel to celebrate and liberate it from the strict rituals required for attaining a "palagified" body like Fayaway in Melville's *Typee*, Bougainville's maiden, or the mythical Sina of Samoan legend. The reinvention by Figiel of the mythical story of Aolele and her brothers subjectifies the Samoan female body of Aolele as it objectifies the male body of Pili and can be read as a foregrounding of a woman's agency in her role as sister in a way that 'bridg[es] the oral to the written form of expression' (1996b, 127) and is yet another significant instance of Figiel's re-writing strategy.

Another aspect of this 'bridging of the oral to the written', or the unconscious with the conscious, lies in the art of dream. Figiel employs it as another strategy for her protagonists to escape from rigid cultural controls over the female body and mind. Anthony Cohen reads this strategy as a mechanism for the self to 'divert attention away from the quotidian struggle, or conflict, or tension between self and society, in which the self routinely resists and eventually triumphs, perhaps does not succumb at all' (Cohen, 1995: 181). Figiel demonstrates this through Alofa, Samoana and Malu, who endure a series of traumatic experiences which sees them seeking escape through the art of dream. The dream-world is a literary device for Alofa and Malu especially to cope with the repressive moral codes of a culture that objectifies the female body as constructs of blind obedience and filial love as well as sexual icons of missionary prudishness.

In *Where we once belonged*, Alofa's accidental awakening to the realities of male sexuality and the violation of taboo between father and daughter creates an inner conflict or tension which releases her 'I' self into the comforting blackness of the night when everyone falls asleep and her agaga floats over the village green, uninhibited and unfettered by conventions: 'Leaves talk to me at night, when "I" exist. They show me the bones and their blood, too. And they ask me to suck the blood from them' (Figiel, 1996a; 185). In diaspora, Alofa still manages to transcend bodily form and soar over the urban landscape of Giu Sila, except this time her dream is of happier images, reflecting the spatial distance of the Samoan female body from the locus of cultural control. This occurs on the day the mailman speaks to her for the first time, re-awakening the art of dream: 'That night, I dreamed I was sitting under a leafless banyan tree, full of birds, all the birds one could possible imagine. Except there were no black birds. No red birds. Which meant no grief. No sadness. No despair.' The absence of black or red birds in Alofa's dream signify her ability to negotiate the demands of self and society in diasporic space unlike her dream-world back in Malaefou, where under the controlling gaze of the collective 'We', she dreams of war and blood and headless warriors.

For Malu in *They who do not grieve*, Figiel exploits the dream mechanism to maximum effect so that it becomes almost impossible for the reader to distinguish between the dream element and the real-life elements:

It was when I was ten (in dream-time) that it happened.

They were singing when I came across them and there was much sadness in their song. In the song, they told me of my fate: 'Both men and women will always try to take your power away from you – particularly older men who are jealous of your wisdom, of the knowledge you know at such a young age. Because you don't know what is to happen to you, we will give you protection: we will tattoo ourselves onto your thighs... You will frustrate them with your powers, but they will never be taken away (Figiel, 2000: 42).

Malu's state of mind reveals a disturbed psychological being whose search for sanity requires a transcendence of spirit or agaga over the corporeal. It is after a severe beating by her grandmother that Malu enters the dream-world. Carl Gustav Jung's work on dreams is both useful and limited for my analysis at this point. While Jung recognizes a Collective Unconscious that allows one to access certain primordial

patterns or archetypes which are then manifested in dreams - like becoming a mother, a lover or a warrior (Jung, cited in Rivers, 1917), as a Western cultural category, the appropriation of a palagi model of dream analysis contradicts the essentialist position that I argue for. Nevertheless, Malu's journey into the Forest of Life is a classic re-enactment of the Jungian dream model, for she embodies those archetypes in dream-time. According to Jung, dreams usually occur at 'times of major transtition, reflecting universal themes in personal development, such as...critical moments in the development of one's identity (1917: 38). Malu's salvation from Lalolagi's nightmare is her dream-world, for it is then that she has the freedom to explore, to imagine, to desire.

In a recreation of the myth of the Siamese twins, Figiel locates herself as a locus of that God-like mana that empowers her as an artist. She is venerated for her 'wisdom', 'her knowledge, and for the cultural symbols on her thighs. The body of Malu in dream-time is perceived to be a source of power which can threaten 'older men' of a patriarchal society such as Samoa. Figiel can be said to be using the trope of dream-time to restore native agency and authenticity of the Samoan female body to negotiate a place and space in society. The authenticating and legitimising motif is the female tattoo or *malu* on the thighs, a signifier of the wisdom and knowledge possessed by the modern Samoan woman.

A deconstructionist reading of the main female characters in *They who do not grieve* demonstrates the dualism of the Samoan female body and highlights Figiel's concept of 'wo-man'. She inserts this in her mythical representations of legends and myths based on female figures such as Aolele the Wandering Cloud, Siamese twins Taema and Tilafaiga, Tapuitea the Evening Star and Nafanua, war goddess. Figiel's appropriation of mythical and realistic elements of storytelling can be viewed here as a narrative strategy of magic-realism which combines the fantastical with the mundane elements of Malu's life history to authenticate that fictional yet mimetic representation of identity for which Malu is searching.

5. CULTURAL INSCRIPTIONS ON THE ABJECT BODY

The story of Lalolagi, her betrayal by Tausi and the tragic consequences of that betrayal in *They who do not grieve* inscribe their emotional and physical scars on Malu in ways that define her concept of self and identity. The most notable of these marks of course are the ones that signify her name, for as she recalls: 'The female tattoo is my name. I am the fish, the starfish, the spear, the centipede that never was. I, too, flow down the river' (Figiel, 2000: 14). That is to say, the word Malu stands for the female tattoo that is tattooed on a woman's thighs from below her buttocks down to the knees. Wendt's analysis of the malu in 'Tatauing the Postcolonial Body' emphasises the immensely powerful implications of the female tattoo, as a 'text' or 'script' that signifies a way of life (Wendt in Hereniko, 1998: 403). Malu's tattoo privileges her as a post-colonial body 'becoming, defining itself, clearing a space for itself among and alongside other bodies...coming out of the Pacific, not a body being imposed on the Pacific' (1999: 410). Figiel, like Malu, is this new body coming out of the Pacific in liberation and celebration. The cultural significance of the malu is that Malu's grandmother Lalolagi is one of those stigmatised in a culture of shame by the disgrace of having only one leg tattooed. Wendt explains the enormous cultural implications for a person like Lalolagi:

once the first tatau line goes across your lower back, you must endure until the end. Otherwise, you and your family and children and their children will have to suffer the cross of your disgrace, being branded a coward, for the rest of your lives (Wendt in Hereniko, 1999: 410).

One begins to grasp the torment experienced by the victim of an unfinished tattoo and that of his or her whole family by association:

It was too late. The master tattooist had already packed his instruments...and villagers (women particularly) were already sharpening their knives. Thus did my grandmother go through life. For she had decided it her punishment to live (whereas others took their lives) – living an impossibility after failing such an operation. Her punishment to live with the pain of shame she had put her family through (Figiel, 2000: 14).

The gothic sensation of violence is heightened by images of the tattooist's 'instruments' and the wag of women's tongues like a 'sharpening of knives'. In fact, Lalolagi's tragic biography from the very beginning is a contextual frame of reference for the even more tragic story of Malu's existence. As a woman scorned for her sexuality and shamed by the incomplete markings of the tattooist on her body, Lalolagi copes with her past by using Malu's docile body as both victim and accomplice – victim through the accident of her illegitimate birth and accomplice through a metonymical link with Mary, Lalolagi's love child from the married tattooist. Malu eventually discovers that she is a mirror of her mother Mary. While this may explain why her Grandmother seems to enjoy inflicting pain on her body, it can also be interpreted perhaps as a technique of characterization that is used to unravel the deeper 'layers' of the Samoan female body that the palagi observer may not be able to see. One of the many issues which concern Figiel as a writer is exploring the:

idea of the surface and layers, different layers...and how only one layer is exposed to the Outside world and this unfortunately becomes the layers in which we're seen...Our humanity is based on that one level, that one layer exclusively (Interview, 2002).

In a complex juxtaposition of bodies, Figiel presents an ironic copy of the Mead-Freeman debate: a sexually promiscuous maiden (Lalolagi), an adulterous affair (with the tattooist), a jealous and jilted lover (Tausi), and the murderous rage of the tattooist's wife. The social outcome of this interplay of sexual politics is the abject bodies of both Lalolagi and Malu:

I carry my grandmother's pain, my family's shame, in the letters that spell my name, M-A-L-U. In the commonly known beginning, Malu means 'shelter', 'protection', like a fa'amalu, an umbrella that protects one from the rain. It also means to protect from bad spirits. Thus I have protected the stories of my grandmother, the pain of shame she carries on her thighs, the one that lives in the letters that spell my name (2000: 13).

Once again, I employ western paradigms of psychoanalysis as a strategic tool to contextualise the social and cultural constraints on the Samoan female body. Julia Kristeva explains the abject as that part of an identity that disrupts one's sense of order, creating a divided self that becomes acutely conscious of the borders of her

subjectivity, identity, selfhood, life and death (Kristeva, 1982:1-2). While it is often hidden, the abject is still very much one of the component parts of a subject and resides at the borders of the subjective identity's existence, manifesting itself in behaviour that either disgusts or fascinates us. Both Malu and Lalolagi are abject bodies, but while Malu is able to rise above her abjection, Lalolagi's abject position threatens to disrupt Malu's existence. Lalolagi's tragic background is metaphorically inscribed on her abject body –the living skin on her one tattooed leg and her ear-less head are living proof of the trauma suffered at the hands of the tattooist's wife. While this incidence of abjection mimics the noble/ignoble tension of the Mead-Freeman debate, it is not so much a case of violence for violence's sake but rather, an illustration of the sometimes irrational, passionate, violent nature of the Samoan female body whose ethos escapes the comprehension of the western mind.

6. GIVING VOICE AND AGENCY TO THE SILENT UNSPOKEN

Another meaningful aspect of Figiel's style is her appropriation of the voice of the 'silent unspoken'. In all three books, the voices of the female bodies in Malaefou and in diaspora represent a collective entity of the silent, unspoken voice of the Samoan girl hitherto repressed either by Eurocentric discourse on the Samoan female body or by traditional Samoa culture. Figiel explains her rationale for using the voice of the Samoan female body: 'it was imperative that [it be] a female narrative....and of that age where truth is more pure [and] has not been manipulated' (Interview, 2002).

Figiel prefigures the liberating effect of her narrative in bringing to the surface issues which concern women such as Pisa, Malu, and Alofa. Figiel's voice is the instrument of liberation for the Samoan female body striving like Malu and Alofa to assert and claim a symbolic voice that must be heard and heeded on behalf of Samoan women who have previously been misrepresented. There are the silent, unspoken voices of the young victims of incest such as Ina or Tupu in *The Girl in the Moon Circle*, who could never voice their unspoken words to anyone but their peers for fear of bringing shame and dishonour on their family or village name:

What if other girls from other villages knew about it? We would be the laughing stock of the whole district! Our school would be mocked. Our circle would be dissolved...It is something so powerfully overwhelming...Something that redefined the way we looked at ourselves. And at the women and men especially who surrounded us (1996b: 114).

Tupu's violated sexuality frees Alofa's voice from the walls of the silent unspoken as she asserts her self with the awareness that she is 'no longer afraid. Of anyone' (ibid):

The other day I told Miss Green in my very broken English. That I didn't like it when she called me Missy. Or just Ana. And that it would make me feel much better if she called me by the entire sea clan – sea people – blue ocean that lived in my true name. Samoana.

It felt good. It felt good to stand up for myself. To take that extra risk no one else was gonna take for me (ibid).

As Figiel elaborates, the voice of Samoana is that of a

universal character that is found in every society – in every person that reads her...Ana is typical of the 10-year old girl that is questioning her surroundings – everything she was raised to believe in – in an honest/open/natural way even (1996b: 124).

The voice of the female adolescent is mimicked in the characters of Alofa, Moa and Lili as they attempt to traverse the cultural boundaries imposed on their bodies, while at the same time negotiating an identity within a Samoan village that is becoming increasingly altered by western consumerism. The voice that emerges from Figiel's imaginary female bodies is a complex one that reflects the complexity of universal human nature: 'Writing is a foreign tool, to say the least, and I am "exposing us"...That is certainly a sensitive issue with any society, and Samoa is no exception' (1996b: 131). Selina Tusitala Marsh reiterates that point in the epigraph opening this chapter, for by framing her characters within the social reality of Samoan society, Figiel gives voice to their individual and collective selves. In *They who do not grieve*, the mature voices of Malu and Alofa authenticate experiences of the female body who have discovered a true sense of self. The silent unspoken become the un-silent spoken as Alofa turns her back on the traditional role and expectations of a Samoan female body by rejecting her Samoan lover, while Malu faces the future for her and her unborn child with a valiant determination characteristic of the spirit of the modern female body to 'to move forward. To forget a little bit of the pain of the past...To live in all the confusion of the present, knowing that there are still dreams to be dreamt.'

(2000: 246). It is certainly an affirmation of a voice that refuses to be silenced, refuses to accept the status quo as Pisa or Lalolagi or Tausi did.

What is equally ironic about Malu is that, despite the nativistic and naturalistic form of her body, without its ignoble form of otherness, even without the civilizing niceties of body adornment, it becomes an object of colonial desire in for Mr Winterson. Figiel's rendering of the dynamics of desire in *They who do not grieve* serves as another way of writing back to representations of female bodies like Stevenson's Uma. That is to say, with all the trappings of consumerist society Mrs Winterson has at her disposal for body adornment and despite her privileged social status as the wife of a successful businessman, it is the body of the Samoan maid that is desired as substitute for the palagi female body. It is a moral victory of sorts for the native body, considering the stark contrast between the sophisticated classical beauty of Mrs Winterson and the primordial and natural charm of Malu's body. There is one noticeable difference between Malu and the others, however, and that is the promise of hope for her unborn child. Unlike the abject bodies of her mother and grandmother, Malu gives new hope for the unmarried, fallen Samoan woman. Her baby will be born out of wedlock but she will make sure it is born free of the social stigma that caused other more vulnerable bodies like Ina to choose suicide:

Of course other people will call her child a bastard. Other people will call her many other things. But she will not be silenced. Her voice, a celebration of survival. Malu will make certain that she does. That her baby lives. Breathes a new air, void of the despair of her own history. Her dead mother's history. Her dead grandmother's history (2000: 245).

With this pledge, Malu becomes Figiel's voice for the modern Samoan female body negotiating a sense of identity on her terms. Hers is the voice of the history, past, present and future, of Samoan women who have embodied lived experiences of cross-cultural contact. Malu's sense of inner self becomes the key to unlocking the potential within her, a potential enacted in a mythical past when female bodies such as Tapuitea, Aolele or Taema and Tilafaiga played a dominant role in the ordering of Samoan society. Malu is not Tupu who would throw herself from a tree in order to induce a miscarriage; nor Fili whose mother would induce her unwanted pregnancy in order to stifle the silent noise of malicious gossip. Instead, Malu has the moral

principles of the modern Samoan woman who chooses to assert her individuality and independence and accept her body for what it is – a living text that is worthy of pride and admiration for its agency and independence, but which is characterised by ambivalence. In light of Figiel's concern with the superficial layer of the body that outsiders see, it may also be claimed that Figiel's protagonists continue to manage that tension between the 'we' and the 'I' in a complex, unresolved and multiple way.

Having given an insight into the liminal spaces of cultural complexity that define her characters, Figiel offers a glimpse into a piece of the puzzle that continues to perplex the cultural sensitivities of the palagi mind. I refer to the way Figiel explores the issue of violence in its various manifestations:

I didn't even know I had that in me to go deeper than that. I mean, we're talking about despair. We're talking about grief and issues I didn't even know I had the power to reach those depths. It became very abysmal at times. It kind of shocked me at the same time, that I took myself down there. So it was like diving into a deep ocean and where do you get your oxygen from? How do you breathe when you're down into the depths of the ocean? And that's how deep we are, but outsiders just play around at the beach. They're at the beach! They're not even halfway into the ocean in terms of knowing our characters (Interview, 2002).

We are confronted with the despair of older women such as Lalolagi and Tausi (*They who do not grieve*), whose bodies are literally restricted zones of contact in which momentary lapses of morality are severely punished. There is the silent despair of married women like Pisa (*Where we once belonged*) and Lafi (*The Girl in the Moon Circle*) who accept their status as traditional wife with quiet determination and dignity. There is the intersection of emotional turmoil and cultural conditioning in the youthful bodies of Alofa and Samoana as they navigate uncharted territories of sexuality and identity. There is also the extreme violence of growing up like Malu not knowing one's birth parents and being victimised by a vengeful and abject body of scorned sexuality, Tausi. Intersecting these bodies and these lives are the complex duality of violence and love that characterise the essence of the faaSamoa upbringing for Figiel's female characters. Like the depth of the ocean or the length of the beach alluded to by Figiel above, it is something that only an insider can grasp. In that sense, the ocean of images and bodies coming out of the Pacific serves as a supercharged metaphor for Figiel's writing-back strategy.

Figiel's metaphors of the beach and the 'depths of the ocean' repeats Denning's allegory of border-crossings at the contact zone of the beach (Denning, 1980). Being at the periphery of the ocean, according to Figiel, does not give one an edge on natives or on any human beings. With a play on the spatial metaphor of the beach at the edge of a vast ocean, Figiel also validates Hau'ofa's re-imagining of the Pacific as a new Oceania. At the same time, she invokes Trinh's trope of the 'marrow of the native life' that cannot be easily accessed by the western mind. In order to fully explore the marrow of the native body and draw out the nuances of meaning inscribed on it, one needs to be positioned as an insider for that is the only perspective possible to reach that depth of understanding of the native character, to reach the depths of Oceania.

As I have argued, Figiel has appropriated a hybridized style of writing, incorporating both Samoan and western or palagi methods of representation, to construct models of the Samoan woman that expose her ambivalent nature in terms of identity, status and agency. While she confronts the intense scrutiny of the gaze –of the parents, the brother, the others - on her body, we perceive that she is given agency, through the privilege of the authorial and semi-autobiographical voice of Figiel, to rise above and beyond the stereotypical images associated with the Samoan female body.

The result of this new vision is the transformed bodies of Alofa and Malu. Their decisions about their future manifest what Csordas alluded to earlier - the Samoan female body is not merely subject to the 'external agency' of the family, the village, the others, but an active agent in its 'own construction'. Hence, young Alofa rejects Siniva's vision of returning to a purer, pre-colonial mythic past and turns her back on suicide. In contrast to Siniva, Alofa struggles to make her way as a divided self at the end, with the help of the Tuli of tomorrow. The "malu-ed" Tuli that guides Alofa back to the village signifies not only a movement towards adulthood; it also incorporates emblems of speech, of finding a voice, the mana or authority to speak, and the freedom to embark on an impending journey to new places. In the case of Malu, the coloniser/colonized paradigm is inverted in comical irony. Malu is subjectified as the body having agency – proud of her native body - while her counterpart in Mrs Winterson is objectified and stereotyped as a gendered victim of western concepts of identity which dehumanize the woman's body through excessive diets. Abortion is never an option for Malu; she makes a conscious choice to keep her baby. Instead of

seeing her pregnancy as a sign of shame, she views her unborn child as her salvation - opening her eyes to possibilities for the future. Lalolagi's words to Malu speak to and for all Samoan women such as herself: 'Do not grieve...Who's gonna take care of the living if you grieve over the dead?' (Figiel, 2000: 245). It is a moral that Lalolagi embodies and Malu personifies.

By locating her characters within a cultural setting of Samoan reality, Figiel deconstructs Mead's version of a conflict-free paradise, Freeman's version of a violent society and romanticisation by earlier palagi writers and traditions that deny or suppress the voice of women. She also seeks to break through the 'silencing' of women inherent in the authoritarian nature of the faaSamoa by giving her characters the agency to chart their futures and on their own terms. That is, Figiel insists that Samoan women are not passive victims, mere docile bodies who allow themselves to be inscribed by their society without questioning the status quo.

Thus, it can be said that both Alofa and Malu represent the contemporary Samoan woman who will attempt to occupy the space between the postcolonial despair of women such as Siniva and Lalolagi and the extreme mimicry of palagi culture by those such as Fue in *they who do not grieve*. In order to highlight the voice and agency of the Samoan female body, Figiel adopts a specifically Samoan style of writing that is associated with 'embodiedness' and the rich imagery of the Samoan language. In order to neutralise and control the potential vulnerability of her narrative from the interrogative gaze of both outsider and insider, she appropriates the innocent voice of youth as well as the healing power of humour. Figiel succeeds in liberating her female protagonists from the frozen frames of the palagi and native gaze by choosing to follow the Tuli of Tomorrow into the "unchartered waters" of the future.

CHAPTER 3: COLLAPSING THE MEAD/FREEMAN MYTH

One would think that a culture that is stress free and condones free love-making wouldn't have a problem with showing affections in public, premarital sex, sexual enquiries, kissing in public, opposite sexes holding hands, sexual courtships, etc. Yet traditional Samoa finds the above very offensive and a real threat to our traditional and family values (Isaia, 1999: 71).

Mead was a palagi woman who wrote a book on Samoan girls doing 'it' a lot...and they were loving it and loved 'it' too. Freeman was a palagi man who said that Mead, the palagi woman, was wrong about Samoan girls doing 'it' a lot...and that Samoan are jealous, hateful, murderous people who do not know how to do 'it' (Figiel, 1996a: 204).

Perhaps [Mead] should have published her book as a work of fiction – and her prose style is one of the most lucid I've ever read – depicting the utopia she wanted the world to be. But to claim that her Samoa actually existed and was founded on anthropological truths which can be observed and measured was, ultimately, to invite attack for giving "fanciful" information (Wendt, 1983: 69).

Of all the aspects of Samoan culture that have been subjected to the scientific and creative scrutiny of the western gaze, it is the category of sex and sexuality that has stirred the Samoans into a frenzy of opposition. Ever since Mead's bestseller on Samoa was first published, Samoans have voiced their objections to Mead's conclusions about their sexual behaviour but their voices have always failed to generate much interest. Samoan women have had to struggle with the 'truth' as perceived in the western world with their versions of the 'native truth' about their own bodies which differed markedly from Mead's truth. From a pragmatic perspective of knowledge about the perception and nature of the faaSamoa, the native truth about the Samoan female body is more like Isaia's 'bird in a cage' than Mead's maiden of free love. By the close of the nineteenth century, the Samoan female body had become a cultural construct upon which Christian morals and Samoan traditions had inscribed distinct borders and boundaries of sex and sexuality according to custom and religion.

The phenomenal success of Mead's *Coming of Age* with Euro-American readers can be attributed not to the mass of ethnographic details that would have made this ethnographic text tedious and boring to read, but to the promise of free love under the palm trees, a powerful image that drew many palagis to Samoa with the hope of living the myth. As Fay Alailima²¹ would admit: '*Coming of Age* lured many Americans (like myself) to Samoan shores' (Alailima, 1984: 93). The opening passages of the text are cleverly written to enhance the romantic picture of a free-love paradise in which erotically charged constructions of Samoan adolescent bodies conjure images of sexual abandon in a stress free society:

As the dawn begins to fall on the soft brown roofs and the slender palm trees stand out against a colourless sky, lovers slip home from trysts beneath the palm trees or in the shadow of beached canoes, that the light may find each sleeper in his appointed place....Sex is a pleasurable thing: the freedom with which it may be indulged in is limited by just one consideration, social status In matters of sex the ten year olds are equally sophisticated....the custom of young lovers of using the palm groves for their rendezvous, makes it inevitable that children should see intercourse, often and between many different people Masturbation is an all but universal habit, beginning at the age of six or seven (Mead, 1949: 19).

Mead's ardent description, which recaptures traditions of representations of native others as discussed in Chapter One, focuses specifically on their young tender bodies and the available sexuality scripted on those bodies. The young maiden on the rug in Bougainville's journals is clearly evoked here, for Mead's idea of the unrestrained sexuality enjoyed even by the very young can be metonymically linked to the young body of Bougainville's maiden. Provocative scenes like these that perpetuate western notions of the Samoan female body as an open and closed book on free love provoked Malopa'upao Isaia to write a scathing critique of Mead and the American Anthropological hierarchy, ridiculing the sexual promiscuity expressed above as 'offensive and an insult to the integrity of our young people' (1999: 44).

²¹ An American scholar who ended up marrying a Samoan and has lived and raised a family in Samoa for over thirty years.

Derek Freeman's refutations of Mead and the heated debate surrounding the Mead-Freeman controversy has embroiled western anthropology in claims and counter-claims about Mead's and Freeman's methodologies and personal or professional agendas. Meanwhile, the voices of Samoans, lost somewhere in the halls of western academia are either ignored or rendered irrelevant. To most Samoans, Mead is simply a victim of what Tuaopepe Felix Wendt calls '*taufa'ase'e*': 'It generally occurs when the respondent gives the answer that he/she knows is what the questioner wants to hear, even though the respondent knows it is not the truth.' (Wendt, 1984: 98). In other words, Mead was a hapless victim of what many palagis experience as outsiders or strangers in Samoa – being duped by natives who proffer misleading information for a variety of reasons: for humour at the expense of the palagi (the most common reason); to impress the palagi and one's peers; or to be respectful or hospitable to strangers by saying what they want to hear.

The Samoan female body in Figiel's novels is thus positioned as an embodiment of cultural norms of behaviour which ultimately foreground a figure of femininity that is far removed from that propagated in the Mead/Freeman debate, but which is closely associated with what Samoans themselves conceive as the true, authentic body of a Samoan woman. That is, the body of the Samoan woman is a locus of complex subjectivity with passions, emotions and feelings masked by an outward demeanour of simplicity and passivity - a bio-cultural entity that defies exact categorization by palagi anthropologists who often mistake her excessive hospitality and native charm as an embodiment of the happy-go-lucky native or primitive content with the simple pleasures of life in paradise and living a very 'uncomplex' life (Wendt, 1983: 12).

When Alofa naively mentions to her friends an article in the *Time* magazine about a palagi woman's comments about the Samoans 'doing it' and 'loving it', (Figiel, 1996:9), she echos Figiel's reappropriation of the same stereotyping strategy in order to collapse the 'Mead-Freeman Controversy':

My books are not trying to refute what they have said. What they have said is more an anthropological argument in which Samoa happens to be the background to that argument...they're trying to find out about American adolescence....we're just something

to kind of prove a theory. So that's why they are also background in my narrative (Interview, 2002).

The flippancy of Figiel's remarks about the Mead/Freeman debate and the act of backgrounding Mead and Freeman in Alofa's intertextual reference to them is Figiel's way of restoring the agency of the Samoan woman – by illuminating through what happens in the novels the absurdity of palagi claims about the Samoan female body. To illustrate, Alofa's apparently humorous approach to sex and sexuality can be construed as Figiel's way of giving voice to the Samoans' quest for the truth. By relegating the Mead/Freeman debate to a mere paragraph while exposing the Samoan female body in a fictional cultural context which defines the realities of life in Samoa better than Mead or Freeman ever can, Figiel portrays an authentic “kaleidoscope” of experiences that is shared by the reader and her characters as they deal with their sexuality and the tabooed subject of sex while negotiating the cultural demands for a virtuous and disciplined body.

This Chapter presents a textual and contextual analysis of the Samoan female body as a site of femininity and sexuality and a locus of the kind of faaSamoa discipline that creates much storm and stress in the individual. Drawing upon Trinh Minh Ha's model of authenticity and insider or native perspective (1989; 1999), I argue that Figiel captures the true essence of the Samoan woman than Mead or Freeman ever could. In adopting Isaia's metaphor of a ‘bird in a cage’, I hope to communicate a sense of the cultural norms and restrictions that govern Samoan conceptions of sex and sexuality. Like a bird that is kept in a cage to protect it from other birds of prey, her brothers or male relatives closely guard the sexually mature body of the adolescent girl or woman. This strict supervision of the body usually creates psychological and emotional stress that can be resolved either by resorting to humour, a musu or defiance state, total submission, or suicide. The theoretical context of my argument is shaped by the work of scholars such as Anna-Marie Tupuola, Melani Anae, Malopa'upo Isaia, David Liu, and palagi anthropologists Bradd Shore, Penelope Schoeffel and Marie Mageo. The studies conducted by these scholars presents what I myself, from personal experience, believe to be an authentication of an upbringing grounded in the faaSamoa that Figiel has captured so well in her novels.

In *Coming of Age in American Anthropology: Margaret Mead and Paradise*, Isaia presents an accurate ethnobiography of a people who have been misconceived, misperceived and misconstrued ever since Mead constructed a non-existent 'free love society' in the western mind:

In Mead's claims, our traditions supposedly condoned promiscuity, a claim which is clearly in conflict with traditions, family morals, and native traditions (1999: 141).

With true Samoan humour, Isaia regales the reader with perceptive and lively descriptions and commentaries on the nature and character of the Samoans, their customs, beliefs and behaviour. Of particular interest is the way Isaia divides Samoa society into two sub-cultures structured around a binary opposition of repressive regulations of sexual behaviour on the one hand (the adult culture) and the adolescent sub-culture 'ever ready to fly away into freedom at every opportunity' (1999: 143). Similarly, Anna-Marie Tupuola's study *Adolescent Development in Samoa* employs with striking success Samoan-based paradigms²² to explore and to evaluate Mead's conclusions (Tupuola, 1996). Her respondents, all Samoan women born and raised in Samoan or in New Zealand, testify to a faaSamoa upbringing that mirrors with uncanny resemblance Figiel's novels. Melani Anae's study on Samoan men's sexuality highlights the different standards for men and women in terms of sexuality and sexual identity, while *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* looks at identity journeys of New Zealand born Samoans in Aotearoa. Shore and Mageo lived in Samoa and studied Samoan culture extensively for a number of years. Their ethno-psychological perspectives generate a better understanding of the Samoan ethos than the Mead/Freeman paradigm permits. Schoeffel-Meleisea's comprehensive study *Daughters of Sina* is another narrative that gives voice to a cultural-specific analysis of gender and status of Samoan women. Albert Wendt has publicly refuted Mead's conclusions and traces Mead's myth to the possibility that

²² All of Tupuola's respondents were active participants in the research, presenting their own versions of their life-histories and given the opportunity to critique Mead's conclusions. They were also consulted in the correlation and formulation of data, an approach novel to the field of ethnography in Mead's times.

People everywhere look to other cultures for cures for their own ills: the grass is greener elsewhere. [Mead] imagine[s] others to be happier than us; that the inhabitants of sunny, exotic lands have fewer hang-ups, and enjoy emotionally healthier lives (Wendt, 1983: 11).

Against this background of institutionalized denial, Figiel weaves a fiction that depicts a Samoan female body that dares to confound cultural purists and moralists as it challenges both western and Samoan conceptions of the female body.

Isaia's discourse on the sexual sub-cultures within mainstream Samoan society forms a thematic backdrop to Figiel's stories. His metaphor of the Samoan female body as a 'bird in a cage' captures that essence of Samoan-ness that Wendt evokes or the 'marrow', as Trinh calls it, of Figiel's Samoan characters. The metaphorical extensions of the idea of captivity, of bodies disciplined and controlled as if imprisoned, coincide with suppressed subjectivity and sexuality as experienced by Alofa, Samoana and Malu and the other Samoan female bodies. They are deployed by Figiel as complex metaphors for all the ideas and beliefs generated within literary discourse about the Samoan female body. They become strategic bodies with which Figiel negotiates the boundaries of history, culture and imagination to achieve a triple purpose: to construct a fictional story of forbidden sex, repressed sexualities and sexual identity; to challenge western or palagi notions about the sexualised Samoan female body; and expose current native beliefs about the Samoan female body.

1. REVERSING THE COLONIAL GAZE

There exists an 'adolescent sexual sub-culture' which is quite different from the larger mainstream 'adult sexual culture'...The two cultures co-exist one within the other, but are two distinct identities. One (adult culture) frowns upon the other (adolescent sub-culture), while the other is like a wild bird in a cage ever ready to fly away into freedom at every opportunity (Isaia, 1999: 143-147).

...sex is taboo in Samoa. The only knowledge they get about sex is from what they do themselves, through their experiences and that's why girls end up falling pregnant. Because

...they're so restricted at home and the little freedom that they get, the little time they get to take off and hide. They try to make up for everything in that time. They try and do as much as they can. But they don't know anything about sex, they just go through it and get pregnant...You can't say it's sexual freedom 'cause it's not....So Mead has wrongfully interpreted this behaviour (Tupuola, 1993: 136-7).

Figiel uses the female body as a counter-strategy of resistance to the way its sexuality is misunderstood and misrepresented. This is immediately evident in the sexually charged opening of *Where we once belonged*. The graphic passage in the first page is a brutal assault on a Samoan's sense of decorum: 'When I saw the insides of a woman's vagina for the first time I was not alone.' Alofa is thirteen years old but has never seen a vagina, implying that she does not even know the geography of her own body. The vagina, that most intimate, personal and private part of a woman's body is opened up to the gaze of the sexually naïve Alofa with a bizarre twist of irony. Alofa receives her first lesson on sex not from any lived experience in the bushes or groves nor from orgiastic experiences with her native peers under palm trees as Mead contends, but from the pornographic collection of *Playboy* magazines owned by the palagi, Mr Brown. In a perceptive representation of western images of sexuality, Figiel exposes the seamy side of a sexualised body as it is constructed in palagi discourse:

The women in the magazine were very happy-looking....Some were smiling a lot. Others looked like they wanted to pick fights...Some were touching their breasts with the tips of their claws. Others did not. Some were touching their vaginas with the tips of their claws. Others did not. Some wore bras without panties. Others wore panties without bras. Some of the panties had holes in the crotch. Others had panties with such thin material that anyone could see all their hair (1996a: 11).

The juxtaposition of the above images of the palagi female body with that of the adolescent Samoan female body invoke a whore/prostitute-virgin/maiden dichotomy – there is an unmistakable hint of irony in Alofa's naïve descriptions of the *Playboy* women. She uses words that invoke animalistic sexuality previously reserved for the ignoble savage(ss) paradigm of European models of the Polynesian female body. In a reversal of the gaze, Alofa sees the palagi models as the ignoble bodies of primordial existence. The repetition of the word 'claws' signifies something animal-like. The use

of repetitive phrases like 'Some were touching...Others did not' contributes to the sense of mechanical bodies objectified and commodified like animals in a jungle of cheap sexuality and distasteful sexual poses. There is further irony not so much in Alofa's shocking discovery of the magazine but in the fact that Mead's claims above are repudiated here by Alofa's ignorance of her own body and sexuality.

As a counterpoint to these unflattering images one need only recall the young Polynesian maiden in Bougainville's *Journals* whose nubile body is compared to the Goddess of Love and whose sexualised rituals climax in a revelation of the entry into her temple, a metaphor for the vagina. There is a double irony here, for in Bougainville's *Journals*, the female body assumes cosmological status in allusions to mythical ideals on which the gaze of the all-male audience of palagi outsiders is focused in reverent admiration. In contrast, the graphic sex in the *Playboy* pictures arouses voyeuristic desires in an all-female audience of adolescent native girls.

Figiel ironically reverses the gaze by inverting what was generally perceived as the classic model of first contact with the native other - the Polynesian or Samoan female body as the sexual object of desire by the palagi male body. Figiel resists the stereotype of those first-contact days and constructs an innovative counter-image of female native bodies desiring the sexuality of the female palagi body. There is a satirical play on the double meaning of the word 'other' as it applies to Alofa's description of the female bodies in Mr Brown's *Playboy* magazine. It is the palagi female body that assumes here the position of other, the colonial female body whose objectification, sexualization and sexual mores present an alien counterpoint that contrasts with the Samoan female body. That is to say, the sexual tropes of the Samoan female body are totally inverted in a reverse mode of appropriation with the purpose of liberating it from the mythical constructs by palagi.

Another point of irony arises from the contrived coincidence that Alofa's first look at a woman's vagina, a milestone in her sexuality, is made possible by the sexual perversions of the palagi Mr Brown. In opposition to Mead's conclusions about the sexual habits of Samoan adolescents, it is a palagi male character who owns the *Playboy* magazine that introduces Alofa to her *first* experience with her own

sexuality. In the context of Christian moralizing, one feels for Alofa and Moa as they feebly attempt to be like Afi, the village angel who 'remain(ed) a good girl....a good girl in the eye of everyone (1996a: 4).' Village norms define a 'good girl' as one who is not interested in boys but serves her family, village and church diligently and virtuously; the opposite of course to the abject bodies of illicit sexuality found in Mead's *Coming of Age*. Afi symbolises the 'good girl' who by day expresses the model 'aga' or behaviour expected and encouraged by public morality and church teaching and by night expresses her 'amio' or sexuality in the secrecy and safety of darkness in areas away from normal social life (Shore, 1996).

In a complex web of ironies and counter ironies, Figiel creates and sustains a narrative tension between the fetishized bodies of sophisticated Playboy models and the inexperienced indigenous bodies of simple village girls like Alofa and Moa. Caught between the boundaries of animalistic sexual energy and the sexual mores of a sexually repressive society, Alofa can be excused for becoming aroused at a picture of a woman's vagina:

Suddenly my panties were wet in the crotch...and that had never happened before. My heart was beating, beating, beating also. I was afraid of what was happening, and I was hoping, too, that Lili and Moa's crotches were also wet.

'Ei! O susu le maga o lua ofuvae?' I wanted to ask.

Lili was laughing and laughing. She mustn't have heard my question clearly, so I asked again in my snail-voice.

'Are your crotches wet?' (1996a: 11-12).

This is the height of Alofa's sexual arousal, her self and body battling each other in confusion. While her mind tries to deal with the mortification of experiencing sensual pleasure at the sight of another woman's vagina, her body succumbs to the eroticism and sexual fantasy unleashed by a simple gaze at pornographic images of palagi female bodies. It is no small measure of her lack of sexual experience that, at thirteen years old, Alofa is only just experiencing her first sexual climax from a surreptitious moment of autoeroticism.

Once again, the irony of this fictional scenario is not lost on Figiel, for it plays a significant part in her literary strategy of inscribing the Samoan female body with the

agency to reverse the gaze onto the palagi body. By reversing and shifting the locus of interpretation and representation to Alofa, Figiel distinguishes between western and Samoan notions about the Samoan female body – the *Playboy* bodies are corrupt and corrupted while the native bodies of Alofa and her friends are pure and being corrupted by cheap objectification. Consequently, Alofa and her friends defy Mr Brown's rules and break Samoan etiquette by invading his pantry, in which they discover the object of desire that will initiate Alofa into the sensual pleasures of the female body. Alofa's body becomes a metaphor for the postcolonial woman asserting a space and place through her sexuality in contemporary ideas about sexual preferences. This requires the revocation of the heterosexual gaze of the palagi male and the invocation of the bisexual scrutiny of the native female.

Mead's female body is an open space for sexual discovery, a body that does not distinguish between sacred and private places/spaces. It is a mythical figure that does not discriminate in terms of sexual partners or their availability, nor does it make any self-distinctions. It can therefore be a body of as young as ten years old. Well versed in matters of sex and infinitely familiar with its physiology, it is a very public body with no boundaries or inhibitions. Figiel's female bodies on the other hand are constrained by their ignorance of self and body to the extent that only at thirteen years of age does Alofa see for the first time the insides of a woman's vagina and only at thirteen does she experience the erotic sensations of sexual arousal:

We had never seen that part of our bodies so close up before. We never knew what was behind all the hair. I was the last to grow hair (and breasts). This I knew because Lili used to say I was bald, and that if I didn't stop eating sugar-cane I would never grow hair...never grow breasts (1996a: 12).

The accidental discovery of Mr Brown's *Playboy* magazine becomes a sexual revolution and revelation in itself. Not only does the magazine become the tool for Alofa's sexual education, but the sight of other women's vaginas is an erotic stimulation that causes her to experience sensations she has never felt before, attesting to her sexual receptivity and inexperience. Furthermore, it creates ambivalent sensations of sexual desire in Alofa – her sexual arousal at the erotic images of palagi women's vaginas accompanied by undercurrents of guilt as she questions Moa and

Lili if their crotches are 'wet'. Without being explicitly lucid in sexual details, Figiel presents a teenage body in sexual turmoil as it experiments for the first time in masturbatory stimulation, in response to the inviting gaze of the women in the *Playboy* magazine. Inverting the male-female sexual dichotomy normally evident in colonial discourses on the Samoan female body, Alofa the narrator and the reader are invited to the public spectacle of viewing and desiring the palagi female bodies. What is required is being not just a spectator; it is being an active participant in the personal politics of sex and sexuality. Figiel explores bisexuality in a poignant portrayal that characterises this biological stage of human development as a fundamentally universal feature of human sexuality, albeit employed here by Figiel for her own rhetorical purposes – that is, by constructing incidents of bisexuality as part of the authentic Samoan female body.

Another possible interpretation points to the possibilities for sexual empowerment in the case of the Samoan female body. It is empowerment in this sense that the modern Samoan female body is claiming ownership of her own body by exploring sexual boundaries defined by culture and religion (Liu, 1991). There is a subtle suggestion of lesbianism in Alofa's sexual arousal by the sight of breasts, vaginas and naked bodies in the *Playboy* magazine. Her circumscribed admission to pleasuring her own body as a result of sexual arousal is yet another instance of the Samoan female body crossing sexual borders into a novel space of sexual adventure never before experienced in thirteen years of adolescence. Likewise, her 'crush' on Afi derives from an erotic fascination with Afi's scent, just as an awareness of Afi's popularity with men assures her of the prospect of perhaps enjoying Afi's sexuality. Despite the perceptions of outsiders, we encounter here an incident of sexual appropriation as the native female body appropriates sexual symbols from the sphere of palagi signifiers. This act of appropriation translates into an active mode of sexual empowerment through which Figiel defines new boundaries for the Samoan female body as it is confronted with sexualised signifiers of palagi sexuality, such as 'bras without panties' or 'panties with holes in the crotch'. It can also be defined as an assertion of independence from sexual domination by the male body and gaze. Whichever way one reads Alofa's first encounter with sex and sexuality, Figiel's complex construction of the Samoan female body that challenges past and current perceptions of that body makes it a heavily contested and mapped terrain.

2. SHOCK TACTICS OF THE BODY

Figiel's portrayal of her female characters also break ranks with cultural beliefs about tabooed subjects. Alofa engages in monologues about sex and religion that to many Samoan readers would be perceived as scandalous and sacrilegious, but which I have argued before, seem to lose their power to shock or shame in the foreign language.

Figiel admits to a deliberate strategy of appropriating English which can be seen as yet another strategy of writing back or reversing the gaze of the native. By using English to express the profane and sacrilegious sentiments of her characters, Figiel manages to maintain a public space of respect and deference towards village, family, friends and nation. Her creative imagination thus overcomes cultural constraints about the excessive use of obscenity and she is either celebrated by the majority for her literary achievements or criticised by a minority for her use of sexually explicit language. In written form, this poses few problems, but as a performance artist, Figiel performs public readings of her work. One can perhaps empathise with her situation and that of the deeply religious Samoans if they were to hear passages such as these read aloud:

I swore to Lili and Moa that I would not tell anyone about us watching women touch their fucking-fucking-fucking-Jesus-Christ vaginas (Figiel 1996a: 12).

Motherfuckers!' I said...

Hesitantly at first, trying to find the courage to say the word 'fuck' in the same sentence as the word 'mother'....Until I was screaming at the tip of my lungs:

'MOTHERFUCKING GHOST! LEAVE ME THE HELL ALONE!

'Go to the river and kill yourselves, you Siamese cunts' (2000: 55).

Alofa delights in shocking the cultural sensibilities of the Samoan reader with blasphemous language that would be deemed highly unchristian and disrespectful for a Samoan woman to use in a public forum but which, as I have argued earlier, is part of Figiel's literary strategy of ascribing agency and giving voice to her female characters for them to explore and experience.

Alofa's accidental discovery of her father and her teacher under the bridge verifies another reality of the Samoan female body—inexperience of heterosexual expressions of sexuality. Because of the tabooed nature of sex in the faaSamoa, witnessing one's parent in the act is a traumatic experience. The subject of sex itself is so tabooed that it is not even discussed between parents and children (Tupuoloa, 1996; Anae, 1998; Isaia, 1999; Schoeffel, 1978; Mageo, 1998).

Passages like those above juxtapose the raw unadulterated sexual energy of the 'new-born fugafuga'²³ and sexuality with the earth-based symbolisms of an eroticised Mother Nature. The 'fucking-fucking-fucking-Jesus-Christ vaginas' is a metonymic extension of the *Playboy* female bodies which, in light of Figiel's views on the linguistic neutrality of profanity in English can be excused for any perceived cultural insensitivity as far as Samoan readers are concerned:

Then I saw 'it'. Like a new-born fugafuga worshipping pregnant clouds...Then the tongue...That lizard tongue, now, surrounding the cloud worshipper, the fat fugafuga turned eel. She takes the eel into her mouth, eyes closed, fingers scratching his buttocks...the eel slipping in and out of her now lizard mouth...him crying...crying-crying (Figiel: 1996a:175).

The sexual encounter above however between Alofa's teacher Mrs Samasoni and Alofa's father Filiga assumes a totally different aspect that is far removed from the romantic scenarios portrayed in palagi narratives. While this can be read as another expression of agency through which Mrs Samasoni expresses her sexuality by asserting her sexual prowess and refuting Freeman's claims that, as Alofa remarks, Samoans do not know how to 'do it', Figiel is also mindful of the impact of writing in the vernacular in scenes such as these. Alofa's description of Mrs Samasoni and Filiga 'doing it' is heavily gauged in metaphorical discourse troped in images from Mother Nature - the pig, fuga fuga, eel, lizard and dog. Alofa deals with the odious sight of her father and a woman other than his wife (Alofa's mother) having illicit sex, by framing the experience in terms of the familiar. Her response is to lose herself in the figurative domain of language and create fantastical analogies of animal bodies in a

²³ Samoan for a sea creature with black skin and phallic shape.

frenzy of 'clawings' and 'thrusting' and 'eating' and 'sucking' so as to reflect the savage turmoil of an adolescent mind sullied by this scene of tabooed sex. Another reading would be to objectify them as other, not dissimilar to the animal-like *Playboy* bodies with their 'claws' and 'clawing'. This scene may also be read as an objectification of the other, the liminal bodies of Filiga and Mrs Samasoni, whose lack of sexual restraint produces a state of abjection for Alofa in particular. Alofa's shock at the sight of her father and teacher 'doing it' plunges her into a liminal state, a threshold of symbolic space created by the violation of taboos. The psychological impact of the incident suspends her momentarily in an in-between space of disbelief and denial and she immediately dissociates herself from the moral implications of such a scene by using mepahors from a familiar landscape, as a coping mechanism for the stark horror of the scene before her eyes – an act that is as much resistance as it is denial that she has seen her 'father's penis...and it was not with Pisa' (Figiel, 1996a: 161).

3. ADOLESCENT SUBCULTURES

The *Playboy* magazine is a crucial symbol in terms of Alofa's development of her sense of sexual identity, a perception of self-worth that is interchangeable with a new personal identity. Growing up in the village of Malaefou, the Samoan female body is transversed by intersecting forces of palagi and native culture. With Lili and Moa, they construct themselves as tropes for those sexual icons of western female bodies, Charlies's Angels, each body manifesting a uniquely palagi standard of sexual attractiveness:

Lili was Kelly. She had the best haircut, black hair (clean of uku), blue eyes (big-big), breasts (big-big), pretty legs (with no sores blasted all around them)...

I was Jill and I had blonde hair, blue eyes (too), always wore pink lipstick, sunglasses, jeans, and had an eighteen inch waist. Moa was Sabrina. She looked part-Chinese, straight black hair, never wore a dress, and was perhaps the cleverest of the three of us (Figiel, 1996a: 6).

These are all manifestations of what Isaia terms 'the adolescent sub-culture'. The female bodies in this case are self-hybridized into bodies that, in Homi Bhabha's terms, mimic the much desired body(ies) of the palagi women in an attempt to construct a social self that embodies the qualities and virtues of that body while at the same time subverting those very qualities and virtues in a manner consistent with that body's sexuality and identity (Bhabha, 1994). Thus, bodies cross geographical space only when the moon circle is in session or when they are away from the scrutiny of the adults. It is only then that the young female bodies negotiate sexual identities in terms of their own individual bodies, crossing the boundaries of the adult sexual culture in moments of sexual arousal or stimulation.

There is a heightened tension here of the conflicting images of two different bodies – a sexual object of desire and a good Samoan girl in the eyes of the community. This tension is played out every day as Alofa has to accept an identity imposed by the village women and her mother, that she and Moa are 'only in-betweens' (1996a: 4). The positioning of Alofa's body as an 'in-between' is riddled with cultural and personal significations. As a locus of social control, she is considered by the village women as lacking the requisite qualities of a 'good girl' on grounds of displaying inappropriate behaviour:

we loved laughing, and laughed and laughed at the slightest things.

....When Elia....jumped up to spike the ball....And his lavalava fell....And he was not wearing underwears.

...when Mu's father wanted to borrow money from his palagi boss and told the palagi he needed it for Mu's funeral...even though Mu was the healthiest of all his children.

....whenever Sugar Shirley, the fa'afafine, walked around Malaefou with nothing but Tausi's panties and bra stuffed with coconuts (1996a: 5).

By engaging her body in adolescent pastimes of mocking and ridiculing the way adults like Elia, 'a matai', Mu's father and Sugar Shirley, 'the fa'afafine', transgress the norms and expectations of a respectable Samoan body, Alofa reveals the idiosyncracies inherent within the sub-culture of the adolescent female body. Ignorance about her own sexuality is counterbalanced by surreptitiously gained experiential knowledge of sex. An accidental 'gaze' at Elia's genitals during a game of volleyball places her a little bit higher in the esteem of her peers. The fact that

Mu's healthy body is exploited by her father as collateral for an easy loan from his palagi employer underscores the availability of the female body as a 'tool' to be manipulated according to the dictates of the wider cultural community. The transvestite body of Sugar Shirley becomes the artificial model of female sexuality as 'she' parades in town wearing nothing but the 'panties and bra' of Alofa's grandmother Tausi. It is an act that elicits laughter and ridicule from Alofa and Moa as they subconsciously regard themselves as sexually superior to Sugar Shirley, who has to resort to voyeuristic displays of femininity to be recognized as an authentic 'female body'. In doing this, Figiel injects irony and humour to the diverse ways in which taboo subjects such as sex and sexuality are negotiated by different characters. For the sexually naïve and inexperienced Alofa, surreptitious experiences related to sex and sexuality become a subject of laughter and amusement within the moon circle, but within the clique of village women it is given a wholly different interpretation. The young female bodies are seen as engaging in wanton displays of conduct deemed immoral and sinful, for by laughing aloud or in public can only mean either that one wants to attract boys or men or one is a pa'umuku, a prostitute – a moral judgement that turns out to be unfounded as we see in Alofa's case. Against this background of puritanical morality, Alofa explores and negotiates the strict borders of sex and sexuality with the help of her friends. It is a journey laced with all the emotions a normal adolescent female body would experience in its search for a sexual identity - passion, desire, lust and love. Alofa's search is complicated by conflicting images of her body, her self: Alofa as Jill of Charlies' Angels, Alofa, as dutiful daughter of Pisa and Filiga and Alofa who loves Lealofi. As she develops from a thirteen to a sixteen year old adolescent female, she eventually comes to terms with her sexuality by submitting her body to the sexual mores of Malaefou culture. That is to say, she develops her sexuality through bodily experiences and by appropriating sexual images imposed on her by others.

The irony of Alofa's search for her sexual identity is that despite the lessons learnt from Afi's case or the primal scene, she chooses to cross boundaries and navigate her sexuality not according to the moral and cultural mores of Malaefou but according to the desires of her sexually maturing body. With the arrival of the moon sickness, Alofa's body shows increased permissiveness in thinking about sex. This is the stage when Alofa begins to have a sexual interest in boys, namely Lealofi, the pastor's son.

It is an interest that has been slow in developing, for she is sixteen years and eleven months exactly when she has her first menstrual period. In light of her previous sexual experiences and their negative impact on her sexual perceptions, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Alofa's lack of interest in boys up to then stem more from the effectiveness of cultural and moral strategies imposed upon the female body to block the experience of one's sexuality than from a repression of natural urges.

It is only when she gets her first menstrual period that Alofa begins to experience a real sexual interest in boys. With the moon's visitation come the increasing reality for Alofa of acquiring a sexually mature body and the realization that such a body is desired by 'winkers'²⁴. It is a body anxious to experiment with newly found boundaries of sexuality. Alofa is like a 'wild bird in a cage', looking for an opportunity to navigate new found waters of her sexuality, but is blocked at almost every step by social constraints on her sexually mature body. It is not long before her casual interest in Lealofi transforms into something more sexual as she begins to be aware of his interest in her.

Sexual fantasies about Lealofi dominate much of Alofa's consciousness (1996a: 157-8), while Samuelu, Lealofi's brother, loses himself in his sexual fantasies for Alofa (1996a: 155-6). Once again, Figiel replicates a common aspect of the adolescent sub-culture that Isaia explains:

Most of our ways of approaching a female was not with words at all, but with body and sign language, eye contact, and a bit of what we called a 'drooling look' (pupula aisi). You know when you look across the neighbour's huts, and drool over someone that is just perfect for you, except she's not interested in you, but your older brother (Isaia 1999: 149).

The climax to Alofa's journey of self-discovery is a prolonged affair that begins with her first sexual contact with male sexuality. It is an incident filled with embarrassing moments of innocent awakenings, puerile sexual urges and naïve expectations to which is added Figiel's witty and humorous storytelling:

He wanted to give me something and told me it was in the pocket of his iefaikaga.

I said, you get it out, but he said he couldn't. His fingers hurt too much from playing the piano. I looked around first to see that no one was looking before I reached into his ie. My hand came into immediate contact with his fully erect penis. Instead of removing my hand, as any good young lady would, I found myself standing there in the middle of the malae holding the faifeau's sons' penis, saying something stupid like: 'Are you walking or going by bus tomorrow?' (Figiel, 1996a: 209).

It can be assumed from the narrative structure of this chapter that Alofa did more than hold 'the faifeau's son's penis', for there is a narrative break as signalled by the signifier – 'Did you like it?' – and in the very next section, the following dialogue reveals that Alofa is not quite the sexually inexperienced body that she was before:

'Did you like it?'

'I've never touched one before.'

'I know. We can meet here again on Monday night if you want.'

'I think we should stop before any of my brothers find out.'

'But I'm the faifeau's son. Aren't you forgetting?'

'What do men do to penises with women?' (1996a: 210).

One way to read this is as Alofa re-negotiating the whole concept of heterosexual relations in a complicated interplay of resistance, constraint and agency. Beneath the seemingly guiltless display of her limited sexual knowledge lingers a subtle sense of the modern Samoan female body willing to exert agency over her sexuality by asking a bold but blunt question, 'What do men do to penises with women?' With the raw audacity of a teenager keen to experiment and explore the uncharted territory of her sexuality, Alofa challenges traditional concepts of amio and aga prescribed for the virginal female body and illustrates once again Figiel's strategy of turning the gaze on palagi and native views of the Samoan female body.

²⁴ The term is used by Alofa (p. 207) to refer to boys or men who wink at girls to indicate their sexual interest.

4. AMIO AND AGA

Brad Shore's explication of amio and aga reveal the extent to which Alofa has taken control or agency over her body in violation of the brother-sister *feagaiga* (or covenant). For if *aga* corresponds to ideas of 'social constraint, dignity, and subordination of personal impulse to cultural style and social control' and amio refers to the 'actual behaviour of individuals as it emerges from personal drives and urges' (Shore, 1981: 196), Alofa's amio has superimposed itself over the notion of *aga* expected of her in terms of the brother-sister *feagaiga* (or covenant). She has defied family and communal mores by her sexual liaison with the pastor's son. Fear of her brothers or Filiga or of the collective shame on the family name are subsumed under the cloak of darkness provided by their night time meetings. This gives her a false sense of security and the confidence to be bold, daring, and willing to be both the seducer and the seduced. This of course leads to the fateful discovery of their naked bodies in the very act of amio inosia or disgusting sexual behaviour. The extreme punishments performed on her body testify to the severity of her *amio*, but she bears it with dignity and a resilience of spirit. She comes to accept that, despite the complex intersections of family and communal constraints on the body, she enjoys the greatest gift for which one can ever ask from one's family, the gift of love. While Lili may be Mr Brown's mistress or her father's victim, she, Alofa, is beaten up badly by her parents because she is loved. This of course invokes my argument earlier on about the ambivalent combination of violence and love that inscribe their marks on the female body. Wendt corroborates this invocation of Love in terms of Samoan identity:

I contend that the overriding characteristics of the Samoan ethos is alofa (love); alofa is the foundation of the total fa'aSamoa (the Samoan way of life)...In making this contention, I am well aware that some quarters of the academic world will demand proof and corroborative evidence. I have none, other than the fact that I am a Samoan (1984: 96).

This is the logic which turns out to be the key to Alofa's sanity and self-discovered identity at the end. It is a belief that is alien to the western or palagi mind, but as Tupuola comments on the stories of her female participants, violence and alofa create an ambivalent intersection of emotions:

Several of [these girls] disobeyed their parents because they wanted the freedom to associate with the opposite sex while other women chose to test their will-power. How far would they go with a male if given the chance? Unfortunately, some of these women suffered the consequences. One young woman was caught and severely punished by her brothers and another ostracised from her extended family's household whom she boarded with (Tupuola, 1993: 213).

Even under conditions of constant scrutiny, some girls choose to defy traditional models of control and to exercise agency over their bodies. Alofa is clearly one of those girls. A growing awareness of her sexual identity and a daring sense of adventure pushes her to go beyond the boundaries set by her family and culture. Her temporary triumph over her body is also facilitated by Lealofi's persistence, whose role in seducing Alofa is overlooked by the adult culture as they assign blame for this sexual indiscretion to the girl's body. Had they not been discovered, Alofa would have given up her body to the same urges that caused Fili to become impregnated in a momentary lapse of sexual control. Her triumph can be measured by the fact that she is still a virgin in spite of the shame of being caught committing a wanton act of sexuality. It can be measured more though by her mental resilience in the aftermath of her gruelling punishment, and in her awareness that, even now that her eyes have been 'open to the darkness' of Malaefou, she alone has control over her body. And in making her choice to live, she has taken control over her destiny, unlike Siniva. That is to say, Alofa successfully appropriates a strong sense of self from personal experiences within the in-between or liminal space of contact with others.

The idea of the 'appropriated body' arises from the concept of 'body-appropriation' or the 'bringing of the physical conditions of one's individual being into the matrix of one's personal identity and self-image' (Deutsch in Kasulis, 1993: 9). Such a process, according to Deutsch, proceeds through various stages, beginning with a child's initial struggle to assimilate the physical in order to accept the 'raw material of her body as her own'. This is followed by a largely unconscious process wherein the self or the 'I' continues to develop into adulthood at the same time that it interrogates and appropriates a collective 'We' identity demanded of the body. Figiel's strategy is to develop a character that is noticeably faaSamoa in *aga* or outward behaviour but individualistic in *amio* or personal behaviour (Shore, 1996).

Shore's model distinguishes between an outward manifestation of *aga* and the private inclinations of one's *loto* or *amio* and can be applied to Alofa, Samoana and Malu, whose conduct reflects that sense of actively negotiating the dualism inherent in the *amio* and *aga*. Their *aga* therefore, or what Jeanette Mageo terms their 'sociocentric self', predisposes them always to be 'good Samoan girls' who obey the rules without question and do not do anything to bring shame to the family or village name (Mageo, 1998). On the other hand, their *amio* or egocentric self is comparable to the personal drives and desires mediated by the unconscious, hence their eagerness to adopt *palagi* identities from *palagi* consumerist culture or their illicit voyeuristic gaze at a *Playboy* magazine. When they are swimming in the sea with boys, their girlish conduct resembles those of any other adolescent conscious of her sexual identities. When they are at home or among elders, they are expected to be the docile bodies of dutiful daughters. At school, in church or in the company of the pastor's wife, total submissiveness is the norm. Such a metamorphosis of character can be understood as an instance of Figiel appropriating the subjectivity assumed and expected of the *palagi* female character for her Samoan bodies to demonstrate the universal condition of their development as adolescents, something that is denied in Mead's ethnographic gaze. In the context of what I have stated earlier on about cultural universals, I argue that adolescence as portrayed in Figiel's characters, is both cross-cultural, as against Mead, and at the same time it still takes on and works through cultural difference. That is to say, the *faaSamoa* works on adolescence in such a way as to make it both recognisable to *palagis*, but also distinctively different. Another way of putting this would be to claim that the emotions and passions of adolescence are universal forms of *amio* but that the lived experience of manifesting some of these in daily life constitute culturally specific *aga*.

It can be said therefore the pubescent bodies of Moana and Alofa are in the initial stages of that identity alluded to above by Deusch – they are more preoccupied with the ambivalent task of appropriating their bodies in ways that meet the expectations of both peer and family groups than merely existing as passive members of their community. Their sense of self is structured around a binary opposition of "good Samoan girls" and Hollywood movie stars. No matter how Alofa strongly desires to be someone or something else, she is thwarted by the inescapable force of cultural constraints on her body. It is only towards the end that she begins that next phase of

identity development, when she makes the conscious choice to integrate the 'physical conditions' of her 'individual being into the matrix' of her 'personal identity and self-image'. In other words, it is by exercising agency over her body as it is lived that she is able to come to terms with her own individual sense of personal identity. It is a development of character and personality that is distinctively Samoan in *aga* and *amio*. For Alofa, this epiphanic moment of awareness frees Alofa from the collective consciousness as a "We" of Malaefou and elevates her sense of self to a new level of awareness of her body as an 'I':

After reading Siniva's thoughts I am silenced. Alone. For the first time I am alone. I am alone. I am 'I' in its totality – 'I' without 'we'....without Moa, Lili, girls, boys....I am. What if there were truth in her observations? Like so many before Siniva, should I too pour kerosene over my body and run towards the sea? Should I too put a rope around my neck and hang from a breadfruit tree, drink weed-killer or eat wild berries? As I thought these thoughts the Tuli of Tomorrow flew high up in the sky, a fue tattooed on her wings, a to'oto'o tattooed on her beak. The Tuli called to me, her voice music to my feet, and I began walking....walking-walking....away from Siniva's grave....walking now towards Malaefou, towards the new gathering place where 'we' once belonged (Figiel, 1996a: 236).

Having chosen life rather than death, Alofa discovers within herself a sense of purpose which deviates markedly from Siniva's, for it is a celebration of life, however marred by the inscriptions of rules and taboos on her young body. Despite the restrictions of a hierarchical society on the 'I', there is hope that the future signified by the Tuli of Tomorrow will be her inspiration towards a 'new gathering place' that will justify her existence as an individual. But this awareness of her individuality is ambivalent in that Alofa is still influenced by the 'We' identity, for she walks away from Siniva's defiant form of selfhood and back toward Malaefou, literally meaning 'a new gathering place'. Figiel celebrates the defeat of western subjectivity and its illusion of a coherency and stability in the death of Siniva, while privileging native constructs of the self and body.

This new sense of selfhood will be manifested in *They who do not grieve*, in which Figiel invests Alofa and Malu with authentic subjectivities to navigate the road to total selfhood amidst the complexities of modern life. Where young Alofa and her friends

dream of an idealised palagi body in *Where we once belonged*, Malu and the adult Alofa have to look into themselves for a sense of self-worth in order to accept their native bodies for what they signify – erotic zones of titillation bounded and celebrated within the privacy of the mind and the seclusion of the body from public scrutiny. Figiel offers an interesting insight into how the self-projected images of a desired body evolve into a more mature and confident acceptance of one's own native body:

...in the first book *Where we once belonged* they don't really think about their bodies. It's *that* body that interests them most. In *They who do not grieve* the characters reject that as ugly, there's a self-awareness now, there's a growth in character and people are putting their foot down and saying, 'Fuck it! Fuck that image!', you know...looking inside now and saying, it's all right here...you don't have to look outside...it's almost like de-colonising the mind you know, a self-awareness that comes along with decolonisation...there's one character slowly discovering her own beauty like her thighs – so what if they're big? I love my big thighs! (Interview, 2002).

The mature Alofa and Malu represent that stage of personal development that Figiel describes. Malu's 'growth in character' is expressed in her silent affirmation of her big thighs, her ka'amu legs²⁵, the primordial scent from the 'valley' between her legs. When Auntie Ela arrives unexpectedly while Malu is weeding outside, the juxtaposition of Malu's natural native body and Ela's artificial beauty collapses the noble/ignoble paradigm as Malu simultaneously satirizes colonial desire which objectifies bodies like Ela's and directs it upon herself in narcissistic autoeroticism.. The notion of 'de-colonising the mind' that Figiel talks about is relevant here in the sense that Malu embraces her body as natural and desirable on her terms while mocking the conventions of feminine beauty.

5. STORM AND STRESS IN A SAMOAN VILLAGE

While Figiel's fiction may be viewed from an outsider perspective as an open criticism of Samoan society, it would be fairer to assert that she uses the genre of

²⁵ A root crop that grows above the ground is and shaped like a short, thick tree trunk.

narrative fiction to raise awareness of issues pertaining to the Samoan female body or to public perceptions of that body as a bio-cultural entity in contemporary Samoan society: 'I write with a notion of awareness, having particularly Samoan and Pacific Island women be aware that those issues are being discussed in literature' (Interview, 2002). As an insider, I contend that Figiel's creative project is not criticising Samoan society but giving voice to and authentic representation of Samoan women.

With the unique style of a Samoan woman, Figiel constructs an authentic female body negotiating a sense of self within strict boundaries of individual, sexual and cultural identity as prescribed by the faaSamoa. The character of Alofa is in contradiction to that conceived by western discursive practices – she is always in an ambivalent position of extending and pushing boundaries. It is no mere poetic licence then that Alofa in *Where we once belonged* and Samoana in *The Girl in the Moon Circle* both symbolize such a body endowed with the power of the first-person narrative to dramatise, comment, judge, poke fun at, humour and philosophise on life in the faaSamoa. In the process of narration and dramatisation, Alofa and Samoana succeed in unmaking the Mead-Freeman myth of a stress-free promiscuous society inhabited by a people given to savage and murderous outburst. They do this by revealing the complexities and layered meanings of what it is like to negotiate a sexual and social identity under cultural conditions of intense scrutiny from family and community. I turn to Alofa's traumatic experiences with sexuality for illustration.

Filiga's response to finding out that Alofa has seen him with another woman is to maintain a silence that increases Alofa's anxiety. After a stunning performance by Alofa in a White Sunday play, 'The Prodigal Daughter', Alofa is exiled to a relative by Filiga in a ironical reversion of the biblical story. She is tormented by ambivalent feelings of love, hate, pride, respect for her father, but wills her Self, the 'I', her mind and body, to accept her exile and more importantly, to keep her secret.

Pisa's reaction is to subject Alofa's body to further abuse. The rest of the household are united in condemning Alofa and calling for corporal punishment to be wielded over the minds and bodies of the young as a form of cultural control. Such incidents are common in the faaSamoa upbringing, and are as true for Figiel as they are for many native-born as well as New Zealand born (Tupuola, 1993; Anae, 2000;

Interview, 2002). This 'dark side' (Wendt, 1983: 14) of the faa-Samoa is privileged by Freeman²⁶, vehemently denied by some Samoans²⁷, and cleverly crafted by Figiel in the mode of realism and fantasy that informs the narrative structures in her novels.

Alofa's discovery of the illicit affair between her father and her teacher becomes a moment of epiphany, for it marks a turning point in her relationship with her father and with her self and body:

After the event – for that was how I came to remember the thing I saw – Filiga avoided me. He ignored me and was never to speak to me directly. Not that he ever did, anyway. He had always used his eyes, a grunt, the belt to speak to me before. To show that he was happy or that he was proud, he would smile that happy smile, and squeeze my hand in his palm if I was near him. And he would say to me, in such a voice so that no one else could hear, that I was his daughter, and that he was proud that I came first in the Aoga a le Faifeau Annual Exams, or that I delivered my lines without fault on White Sunday. When the faifeau himself acknowledged this same pride in Filiga's presence he would just look to his feet and grunt. And I knew. I knew that he was proud. I knew that I was his daughter. I knew with this single grunt that I was loved...even when I danced with the belt on other occasions (Figiel, 1996a: 178).

There is no trace of the storm-free, stress-free, and free love adolescent romanticised by Mead, in the passage above. What is clearly evident is the storm and stress of a thirteen year old Samoan girl undergoing a biological phase of her life during which her body approaches sexual and physical maturity while her mind develops a conception of self-identity which is stalled at every turn by the rigid rules and regulations of a sociocentric society like Samoa (Mageo, 1998). Distinguishing between a socially organized self grounded in the collective identity of the community and the ego-centric self that defines the individual in relation to the group, Mageo posits that the sociocentric self of the Samoan predominates in identity construction and subsumes the ego-centric self of the person into the private sphere.

²⁶ See Derek Freeman, *The Fateful Hoaxing of Margaret Mead: An Historical Analysis of Her Samoan Research*, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999.

²⁷ Tuaopepe Felix Wendt however, expresses concern that Freeman's version in refutation of Mead also creates another stereotype of Samoans. Rather than denying the dark side model, he objects to the model being used to replace the Mead version as the defining version of Samoan society (1984); in an interview on *Tagata Pasifika* (TVNZ, March 6, 2003) a Samoan female official of the Pacific Trust claimed, to the annoyance of many Samoans, that hitting or disciplining children is not part of the

Alofa's conception of self hinges on a desperate need for recognition and affection from her father. Her need to please her father is so great that she risks being labelled as being *fiapoto*²⁸ as a result of her performance in Sunday School exams and White Sunday recitals. It is the father-figure of Filiga upon whom Alofa stakes peace of mind and body, not the We, the family, the aiga, or the village. This intensely emotional attachment to her father can be understood from a historical/cultural viewpoint of a native/insider perspective as a dutiful daughter's attempt to submit to the patriarchal figure who is head of the family, as evident in a moral lesson instilled in the young: 'O le tama potō e fiafia iai le tama, ole tama valea e faanoanoa ai le tina'.²⁹ Ten year old Samoana in the *Girl in the Moon Circle* has a similar relationship with her father Pili. Despite their fathers' shortcomings, Alofa and Samoana are model bodies that embody the cultural values of respect and obedience to one's parents. For the most part, they manage to escape the dancing of the hibiscus branch or the belt on their bodies. At times they are disciplined for breaking house rules or not performing chores. At all times, they are cultural symbols of conformity.

Alofa's mind and body struggle to negotiate a space between the sociocentric demands of cultural mores and the egocentric pull of a volatile adolescent self so that she might receive an open expression of love from her father. She is willing to endure the ostracism suffered by people like Filifili the village genius who get too smart, just for a word or look of love if not praise, from Filiga:

According to our mothers, air escaped into Filifili's brain.

'Ga sao le ea I le ulu o le keige.'

What did that mean we asked ourselves? Was that what happened to someone who got too smart, too clever for her own good? Did her brain cry out for oxygen, and when oxygen entered it, fried the brain until she suffocated or, in this case, was admitted?...My whole childhood was lived in the fear of being too smart, too clever.

I suppose I was smart. Miss Cunningham said so at Government School. Which frightened me and gave me nightmares constantly. I would nightmare that I came first at the Aoga le

Samoan culture. This was seen as one of those cultural mechanisms which some Samoans use to keep sensitive issues affecting the good name of Samoa away from public scrutiny.

²⁸ Presuming to be 'above others' intellectually

²⁹ Translated: A smart child brings joy to his/her father; a foolish child brings sadness to his/her mother.

Faifeau and Sewing School. Air entered my brain as a result and my hair fell off. I was bald for weeks, months...until the next came and I made sure I was last in the class.

...you never know, you might go to sleep and fall into a dream and forget all your teeth...or air might attack your brain and you might suffocate...or worse even, get admitted (1996a: 226-7).

Aside from Figiel's a vibrant portrayal of an abject body and mind consumed with all sorts of psychosocial neuroses involving cooked brains, bald hair, toothless gums or air-filled brains, there is an disturbing sense of familiarity with Alofa's worries about turning into another Filifili. It is a fate that is perhaps worse than death, for to be 'admitted' to the psychiatric ward at Motootua National Hospital means only one thing in the faaSamoa – you are a lunatic or *vale* to be mocked, ridiculed, ostracized or ignored.

Again, this is in direct contradiction to one of Mead's assertions in *Coming of Age* that Samoa is a society

where no one feels very strongly, the adolescent will not be tortured by poignant situations...So, high up in our list of explanations we must place the lack of deep feeling which the Samoans have conventionalised until it is the very framework of all their attitudes towards life (Mead, 1928: 160-1).

The irony of Mead's observation is that while it is true that one is frowned upon if one exhibits excessive intelligence, she nullifies this by claiming that Samoans lack deep feeling. Yet we have seen how the Samoan female body is a repository of feelings – anger, sadness, happiness, love, lust, courage, despair and hope. To ignore the passions and emotions of Samoan women such as Pisa, Alofa, Malu, Ela, Lalolagi, Tausi, or Mrs Samasoni is to deny them humanity. Isaia examines this further:

To remove the emotions from a person or a race is to remove the human within us. So, for any thinking person, to claim that we don't have strong passions or no emotions is to deny us the essence of every living human being, and an insulting insinuation that we as Samoans are not humans...The suggestion that we have "no strong passions" and that we have taken the road of "eliminating strong emotions" is without qualification and without justification. We belong to a society where you will find the extremes of emotions (Isaia, 1999: 110-1).

In other words, the storm and stress that Mead attributes to American youth and denies to Samoan youth is dramatically validated and literally embodied by Figiel in *Where We Once Belonged*. Through Alofa, we witness the ambivalent tensions between amio and afa that inscribe their physical and mental scars on the female body as it is torn asunder by extremes of peer and family relationships.

At one extreme is the pull of personal friendship between Alofa, Lili and Moa circumscribed by intimate sexual experiences, dark secrets and a highly competitive desire to emulate palagi cultural icons. At the other extreme are the rigid forms of punishments dealt out for infringements of cultural codes of behaviour. The female adolescent body becomes the subject and object of abuse engendered by rigidly prescribed rules of morality. We get a first taste of the violence alluded to by Isaia when Makaoleafi or Afi, is beaten up badly: 'She has a black eye and a shaved head. Filemu found a dirty magazine in her bag.' (Figiel, 1996a:13). By hiding the *Playboy* magazine in Afi's bag, Alofa and her friends commit a villainous deed which results in a terrible beating for Afi. Subconsciously, Alofa dreads the superstitious consequences of what they have done to Afi. Her guilt is magnified as she endures her family's table talk denouncing Afi's sinful behaviour and praising her own angelic qualities, though this is short-lived as Alofa destroys the myth of a 'good girl' by smashing a plate of spaghetti on the floor. Amidst family rebukes and threats of dancing to 'Filiga's stick', she is tormented with guilt, and recalls with horror how one previous instance of what Isaia calls 'inter-family, inter-village, inter-district warfare started, that is 'When Sila, a girl of fourteen, called Fa'avevesi's mother a whore who was screwing all the aumaga of Malaefou, war was waged and Sila's mother was taken to Motootua Hospital. She couldn't see straight for days.' (15). Alofa now fears that Afi will wage war on her.

Alofa's solution for a guilty conscience is to transcend the corporeality of her body: 'When the lights went out that night I died with them. I died to forget. I died to escape. For I knew the rules to Malaefou politics too well.' (Figiel, 1996a:15). It is as if the act of dreaming in the darkness of the night, in a metaphysical bonding with the spirits or aitu of the night accords her the only way to cope with the sexual and social mores of the faaSamoa:

Agaga...lives in people's bodies and leaves and returns to the body when one faints. Loses consciousness. Or dreams.

In the dark. When the mirror is covered. ..When everyone sleeps. My body dies and I don't tell anyone. And my agaga leaves it and wanders (Figiel, 1996b: 27).

That is the turmoil or conflict Alofa experiences as a result of a sexual transgression on her part. The ramifications of her behaviour can be measured in the manner in which she slowly develops a guilt-complex about the *Playboy* incident. Rather than avoid conflict and undergo what Mead calls a 'painless development from childhood to womanhood' (1996a: 160), Alofa sinks into an existentialist stupor of the mind and body as she contemplates the complexity of Samoan nature:

People see surfaces only, and that's all. They don't care to look under tables, or under mats, or in a book, or bite a fruit. They like admiring these things, admiring the way things look only on the outside. On the outside, that is on the surface of a table, everything is beautiful...

People prefer to see the tablecloths of other people, that is, how they look, how their bodies look, how their purses look, etc...etc...

People define other people as good or bad, or clever or stupid, or clever or bad – depending on the surface only....in essence, their tablecloths.

And the inside?...

Unlike a table....the inside of a people is hard to get to simply because there are so many different layers. (16-7)

While Alofa extrapolates on the meaning and form of humanity as it is manifested by the likes of the unpredictable Afi, Figiel uses the voice of the Samoan adolescent to philosophize about the nature of the Samoan character and the perceptions or misconceptions people may have of others. Her constructions of the Samoan female body in its various associations with others reveal this multi-layered structure embedded within and underneath a cultural exteriority of 'tablecloths' that constitute only the surface. That is to say, Afi's body brings together the contradictory images of the Samoan female body of Mead's paradigm of the licentious, sexually active body with Freeman's model of the socially regulated and disciplined body and Figiel's insider knowledge of the 'many different layers' of a person's being.

Breathing and existing in the constant shadow of Afi's model behaviour and virtuous reputation, Alofa is intent on denying Afi any hint of humanity; but when the *Playboy* magazine is discovered in Afi's bag, she is immediately torn by guilt and remorse for she soon discovers that Afi is not quite the village villain that she, along with her friends, imagined her to be. Instead of "rearranging" Alofa's face, Afi suffers her pain and humiliation in silence, an untoward act of heroism that disrupts Alofa's sense of self-righteous discrimination as well as our own assumptions about Afi's moral character. The incident opens Alofa's eyes to the many wonderful possibilities of Afi's body:

Birds flew out of her belly button. Bees and ants and other small insects danced between her fingers, in her armpits, on her toes. Moist, too, was the fern on her nipples, on her neck. And a small river fell from the triangle of her pubic hair...

She now smelt of gardenia...even though it was not the gardenia season (Figiel, 1996a: 18).

Always equipped with a creative and fertile imagination, Alofa-the narrator turns to the lush corporeality of a tropical Mother Nature to visualise and naturalise the blossoming sexuality of Afi's body. Where previously Afi's body exuded the unsavoury smell of 'a bat, a dog, a toilet', it becomes a garden of gardenia tempting boys and men to indulge in her exotic scent.

Taken literally, the truth or reality of Afi's body can be read as a deconstructionist strategy to highlight the structural irony of the native female body that Alofa now perceives to be more attractive to the male gaze than her own *Charlie's Angels*' body. intended. The juxtapositioning of the two models of sexualised bodies, one from the palagi paradigm (Alofa alias *Charlie's Angel*) and the other from the Samoan paradigm (Afi or 'eye of the fire') projects a clear case of dramatic irony in the association of 'eye' with notions of source or centre or origin and 'fire' with passion. When we juxtapose these two bodies, they transcribe a telling irony about the irresistibility of Afi's ignoble abject native body at the expense of a body such as that objectified in palagi discourse. This is further manifestation of Figiel's project of backgrounding western notions about the Samoan female body, and it constitutes a form of resistance to misrepresentations of Samoan bodies by palagis such as Mead.

In other words, just as she did with Malu, Figiel presents Afi's body as the subject and object of desire and frames it within earth images and metaphors while Playbody and Hollywood bodies are marginalized and parodied as empty desexualised icons of palagi society.

This is the beginning of Alofa's journey of self-discovery from the world of the communal 'We' to that of the Self or 'I'. It is a journey rife with the perils of false perceptions and mythic models of perfection flawed by momentary lapses of perverse passion. Beginning with Afi, Alofa's personal journey teeters perilously close on the edge of sanity with revelations about the ugly truth of who 'planted the lizard' in Lili's womb. Figiel handles the incident of incest with magical realism and poignant symbolism, injecting a theatrical atmosphere into the scene in order to lessen the mimetic qualities of the incident and thereby avoiding what would otherwise be interpreted as a true or authentic depiction of Samoan society. As in any other society, such incidents are as real as Figiel's fictional constructions and can be equally traumatic. The emotional turmoil that Alofa suffers is illustrated by her sacrilegious prayer:

'How can you allow this? Why didn't you stop it? If you know and see all, then you could have stopped Iosua from doing what he did. What kind of a god are you? I hate you. I hate you...and your equally hopeless son, Jesus Christ, too.'

This was the prayer I prayed before I drifted into my sleep...before my body died a thousand deaths that night (Figiel, 1996a: 64).

This passage details a form of escape into a space of metaphysical existence in which Alofa's spirit or *agaga*, the individualistic 'I', becomes another entity, the self embodied as a metaphor for the outsider looking on with the gaze of a cynical moralist or outsider passing judgement on the 'kind of god' that would allow Iosua to molest his own daughter. It is an effective literary device for Figiel to use to rationalize the blasphemy that comes out of Alofa's mouth. Such an outburst against God is unthinkable in a highly Christianised Samoan society, and, it is believed, would incur immediate divine retribution such as, according to Alofa, befell a high school student who blasphemed against the Virgin Mary and was found dead in

mysterious circumstances.³⁰ However, in the privacy of a disembodied transcended body, it is safer for Alofa to give vent to the chaos and confusion of her existence with an unusual prayer to a wrathful God. This is emphatically not the kind of Samoan female body moulded in Samoan households, Sunday schools or pastors' residences. Once again, the emotional outburst invokes Isaia's appraisal of a Samoan character that challenges the storm and stress-free existence of Samoan adolescents.

6. VIOLENCE AGAINST THE BODY

Of special relevance in this context is the immediate aftermath of the amorous encounter between Filiga and Alofa's teacher under the bridge. If Alofa died a 'thousand deaths' on the night Lili's ugly secret is revealed, the emotional and psychological trauma of the violation of a cultural taboo between father (Filiga) and daughter (Alofa) is so profound that the only cultural option is suicide. Derek Freeman has established a convincing case from a palagi or outsider perspective on the violence that constitutes 'the darker side of Samoan life' (Wendt, 1983: 14). It is another lived reality of growing up in Samoa, and Figiel manages to weave this tragic-comical element of reality and poetic representation into her narrative:

I woke up on a mat on the floor of the falesamoa, and I was covered with a blanket. I had no inflicted wounds on my body, but my body was burning with fever.

According to a story, I ran away from school. It rained. I must have fainted when I reached the bridge. I was found unconscious near the road, soaking wet House voices, 'Beat her up!'

'Slap that lying mouth of hers! Teach her now while she's young...before she gets out of control!'

Voices continued to live, to be born and multiply, forcing tears into my feverish eyes, forcing my voice, too, to be heard by ants only....and the mat, and the blanket....and me.

'I'm gonna kill myself!'

Pushing the blanket away from my legs.

'I'm gonna kill myself,' I sobbed.

³⁰ This fictional incident is based on an actual case reported from a private high school where a student who had been reported to have publicly blasphemed at the statue of Mary later died mysteriously.

Pisa slapped me across the face; she slapped me again and again. (1996a: 177-8)

The intensity of pained emotions experienced by Alofa in the immediate aftermath of the incident under the bridge or by Samoana in the wake of Tupu's miscarriage threaten to burst through a rigidly disciplined body. The idyllic period of adolescence growth depicted in Mead's *Coming of Age* finds no parallel here. Freeman goes to great lengths in *The Fateful Hoaxing of Margaret Mead* to verify a period of turmoil and stress in the lives of Samoan adolescents, concluding that

'not a few Samoans, during adolescence, are subjected to psychological stress. This stress...is evinced in musu states, and in severe cases in hysterical illnesses and suicides – the Samoan suicide rate for adolescents being, the evidence suggests, significantly higher than in some other countries' (Freeman, 1999 #173: 260).

Alofa's decision to forgo suicide attests to the strength of her inner Self in not succumbing to a permanent disembodiment of body and self, for according to Samoan cosmology, the souls of suicide victims do not enjoy the privilege of entering the Underworld but wander on earth as spirits or ghosts at night. It is a testimony to Alofa's will to survive and succeed where her namesake, Alofa makua or her auntie Alofa failed miserably. While Alofa makua³¹ committed suicide by hanging herself, Alofa the narrator refuses to give up on life. She has an obligation to live the legacy that is Alofa's, as she is 'named Alofa to keep her alive' (1996a: 116). There is more to life than suicide, than death, for there is Lealofi, object of her sexual fantasies.

The violence of Alofa's punishment for being caught 'doing it' with the pastor's son may be shocking to the western gaze, but it is all too real in Samoan society. Many a times her life is one of 'extremes' with which Samoan females are very much familiar – an over-indulgence of affection, pride and love on the one hand and a curious reverse of harsh discipline and corporal punishments when boundaries are crossed, rules are broken and taboos are violated. Between these two extremes exist that inner space of layers that make up a person and that Figiel unveils through her characters. This she achieves this by using irony, humour and pathos to write back to or reverse

³¹ Samoan for senior or elder.

the gaze on how the faaSamoa deals with the Samoan female body in particular situations.

As a young female body on the eve of being visited by the moon sickness³² for the first time and eagerly anticipating such a visitation and the 'honours' associated with it, Alofa deems herself and her 'circle' of friends the quintessence of Malaefou's social clique. This self-imposed conception of identity is soon shattered by the brutal 'discovery' of her naked body in a sexually compromising position with the pastor's son. It is the quintessential moment of disgrace and humiliation in a community embedded with sexual taboos on the female body. Figiel's drawn-out exposition of a mundane Sunday following Alofa's exposure is a masterpiece of narration. The Samoan female reader shares with Alofa the all too familiar sense of foreboding, waiting with trepidation for the expected reaction from her father Filiga while she languishes in those last moments of calm as if rooted, immobile, in the eye of the 'storm' that is set to blow from the source. On the surface, Alofa struggles to sustain an air of normality as if oblivious to the sense of doom and dismay she fearfully anticipates with the eruption of rage that will befall her once the awful truth is known:

Filiga was known in our village as the disciplinarian. His reputation preceded him wherever he went. Parents sent him their children to be disciplined if they were too slow or too weak themselves. This was how Afi was punished when we hid the magazine in her schoolbag. When Solomona's children were caught playing in the vegetable garden, Filiga ordered all six of them and their friends to line up with their pants to the ground, and he spanked their bottoms hard with dried hibiscus branches. When Tomasi's son, Peni, was caught drinking faamafu and smoking cowshit³³ under the Vaipuga bridge, he was sent to Filiga who tied him up like a pig, and beat him with a belt and electric wire until he could no longer move...and women were crying and crying everywhere.

I knew sooner or later that something bad was going to happen to me, and thus savoured the hours of unknown that blessed me (1996a: 213).

Like a robot programmed by culture and tradition to love, honour and obey and never ever bring shame upon the family name, Alofa subjects her body to the physical and

³² literally translated, ma'i masina or the monthly menstrual period.

³³ Faamafu refers to locally brewed beer; cowshit literally to 'kaepovi' or the lethal mushroom growing wild in pasture grazed by cattle.

mental torture prescribed by centuries-old custom and, in so doing, disrupts western notions of female subjectivity and individual or human rights. In the eyes of her elders, Alofa has committed an outrageous act of immorality that proves or shows the greatest sin – that she has no love or alofa in her. As Samoana puts it, alofa is

the virtue that makes you forget about you and you think of others first. Whether it's your mother-father-sister-brothers-grandmother. All members of your aiga. Of the sacred 'we'. The aiga. The nuu. The itumalo. The whole of Samoa (1996b: 12).

By giving in to carnal desires of the flesh, Alofa transgresses boundaries and creates for herself the conditions for an abject body of total humiliation from which there is no way out except providence. In this case, however, the hand of providence is not easily forthcoming. Alofa and Lealofi must perform a ritual healing and cleansing of the body, heart and soul through a traditional ifoga or apology, to their families:

...we were shamed together in front of our parents.

Lafoga: 'This is your brother, Alofa. This is your sister, Lealofi'.

We were supposed to repeat what he said to each of us. And then he prayed for the both of us, and for our family, and our village that Satan would be banished from this, the village of God, and that this should be an example to discourage all future attempts at breaking the laws of the church of God (1996a: 216).

The simplistic remedy suggested by Mead (1928) of children simply moving to another relative's household to escape punishment is a mythical concoction of western utopian fashioning that holds no validity in the 'real' or authentic world of cultural etiquette as experienced by the native Samoan narrator, author or reader. In close-knit communities such as Malaefou, there is no space in which to hide or escape except in the self, but even that option is a temporal solution for the hapless female who would have to wait for the darkness of night to escape into dream-world (Shore, 1996).

Alofa's mental agony is carefully concealed in a nonchalant attitude of subservience and submissiveness as she goes about her normal Sunday chores while 'Waiting... for Pepe to start singing – singing the song she loved so dearly, gossip.' (Figiel, 1996a: 214). She feels an ambivalent mixture of fear and fearlessness as Sunday drags into

Monday. Sunday being a holy day of rest, it is considered irreverent, a disturbance of God's peace, to discipline bodies on that day. For that religious observance, Alofa must suffer the agonising wait until Monday morning:

I had already put on my Samoan High uniform, 'o le ala I le pule o le tautua'.³⁴ Filiga, who never talks to me, said he wanted me to go get the scissors and come over to him. I reacted normally – as if he was asking me for a pillow, or a cup of tea, or matches for his Marlboro. I was asking where the scissors were – knowing, but not wanting to know, what they were meant for.

'Where are the scissors?' I asked Eleele, Who poked her tongue out at me.

'They're in Lealofi's pants.'

Tears came running down my face when I heard Lealofi's name...running down to my feet.

'Where are the scissors? Where?'

'Why are you crying, Alofa? Why are you crying? You should have cried on Saturday night, when the moon was high and all the good girls were in the dance...where they were supposed to be.'

'Fasi is malepe! Oki ese lauguku ma le pepelo so'o!'³⁵

Voices kept flying at me from all directions, like poisonous fish stinging my flesh.

'Where are the scissors?' (1996a: 215)

Pathos and humour and brilliant story-telling direct the reader's response as Alofa's body becomes once again the site of contest, a site of the 'storm and stress' suffered as a result of her failure to control her amio. Tupuola's participants in her study on adolescent developments in Samoa recall similar experiences when sexual boundaries are transgressed. This time, Alofa is culturally conditioned to accept the penalties imposed on her delinquent body. She concentrates her energies on searching for the tools of torture. This time, however, her final pathetic cry of 'Where are the scissors?' comes out as a macabre yet courageous attempt to subvert the role of hapless victim and assert some agency, no matter how feeble, as a private form of resistance to the institutionalised violence that will be staged on her body. For an instant, the mocking reply from her half-sister Eleele that the scissors are in 'Lealofi's pants' provides comic relief for the reader, for inappropriate as it may sound, at moments of extreme

³⁴ Translated: 'The way to authority (power) is through service'.

³⁵ Translated: 'Beat her to a pulp! Cut off her lips so she won't lie again!'

duress³⁶, the uniquely Samoan sense of humour is invoked to deflate tense situations (Tamasese, 2001). As Alofa searches desperately for the scissors, the reader is caught up in the creative tension created by the surreal sense of sacrifice and the uncanny echo of Samoan comic theatre (Gabbard, 1992).

The scissors serve as a sinister symbol of the violence inflicted on the bodies of Afi and Alofa for crossing cultural boundaries. In Samoan society, they remain one of the popular tools for jealous wives or jilted girlfriends to inflict serious damage on the bodies of the other woman, such as what happened to Lalolagi. In the Samoan household, the scissors are a favourite punishment used by parents for wayward young Samoan girls deemed too cheeky if and when they are known or discovered to show or have any interest whatsoever in boys. The hair of these wayward girls are either cut short or shorn as punishment. That is also Afi's fate, for the crime of being caught with a 'dirty' magazine. Alofa's case is at the opposite pole of Samoan tolerance, and what the scissors start climaxes in a fitting finale with a razor blade shaving off the entire hair. The logic behind this is that by removing that one of the most celebrated and treasured symbol of a Samoan woman's body, her hair, she will be reduced to an object of ridicule and scorn, and rendered almost selfless - ugly, unattractive and undesired as a hetero-sexualised body (Mageo, 1994). Mageo posits a cultural analysis of hair in the context of Samoan ideals of beauty:

In Samoa, a girl's hair not only signifies personal attractiveness – it is personal attractiveness, which is after all as much a property of the symbolic bodyas it is a property of the physical body. For most Samoan girls, their attractiveness is not merely a matter of social communication but also one of personal identity (Mageo, 1994: 430)

The cutting or shaving of a girl's hair henceforth serves the goal of the parents in controlling the amio of girls and is one of the most dreaded punishments girls try to avoid at all costs, for no boy will desire a female body that lacks a powerful symbol of femininity and sexuality such as hair. While the Samoan woman's hair closely resembles the trope of Eve's hair in a Miltonic or Melvillian paradise, it could also be read as part of that outer 'skin' that Sidonie Smith refers to as a literal and figurative

³⁶ A trait of personality which baffles the palagi observer but nevertheless a fact, in that Samoans find humour or laughter in circumstances which would normally be perceived as serious and deserving of dignified or respectful attention.

boundary that surrounds one's head (Smith, 1993), the seat of the self. While the head provides a metonymic association with a border zone of the Self - the thinking, private, individual entity - shaving the head would in that sense be a metaphorical act of destroying or disfiguring the essence of one's selfhood and, by extension, the humanity of the body. Alofa's experience is a common occurrence in Samoan households. The commonality of such a traumatic experience may be difficult to comprehend from a contemporary palagi perspective, but it is a fact of 'coming of age' in Malaefou and Samoan society that is a total contradiction of Mead's imagined society.

As a tragic character, Alofa's abject position is fictionalised in a theatrical show of power and domination over the submissive female body. Her beating serves as the cathartic moment in the course of her adolescent development as the following analysis will unfold. It begins as an ordinary punishment for a Samoan girl caught 'doing it' with a boy (Tupuola, 1994; Anae, 1998):

Before my hair was cut, before my hair was shaved, I was slapped in the face. Then a belt hit me across the face, too...around the waist, around my legs, around my face again. Fists blew in my eyes and mouth and cheeks, and blood flew out onto the cement floor.

'Ua lava ia,' said Tausi.

'Aua le sooga faia si keige o Alofa', said Tausi again.

But her words only increased the blows to my body. I had stopped crying then. I refused to cry any longer. No tears. Blood flying everywhere, but no tears.

This angered Filiga more and more, and he shouted that he was going to kill me.

'I'm going to kill you, kill you...'

Iopu and Filisi and Saufoi tore him away from my body. He was sweating...his eyes red like fire...his eyes not meeting mine...afraid, somehow, to meet mine. (1996a: 216)

Alofa insists on a shred of dignity to protect her abused body – she makes a conscious decision: 'I refused to cry.' Even in the face of utter helplessness, Alofa reclaims the power of female agency to deny Filiga the satisfaction of one single tear. This is the ultimate act of insubordination in the faa-Samoa, for it is generally understood by all who have experienced adolescence the Samoan way that if the punished body does not shed tears, it can only be taken as being maliciously guilty of the foremost sin of pride and thus as an absence of remorse in your soul. Alofa's mind is the only private

space of her body that she can claim her own, inaccessible to her family, to no one else but the self.

And so Filiga subjects his defiant daughter's body to a severe beating, if only to see a hint of remorse or the drop of a tear. There are no tears though, but lots of blood. Blood does not count, nor broken bones, to a father like Filiga. It merely heightens a sadistic lust within Filiga to inflict more pain and punishment to compensate perhaps for his conscience about his sexual transgressions. Like a man possessed of the devil and with 'eyes red like fire', it is easy for parents like Filiga to cross the normal boundaries of discipline into the zone of unrestrained and senseless violence.

Perhaps the sight of tears becomes a metaphorical and metonymical symbol for the healing power of love, whereby the universal attributes of water perform a ritualistic healing of the mind and body. The release of tears symbolizes that healing or transforming power of the body to grant relief from further violence while at the same time nurturing the thirst of the abuser, transforming the thirst for blood into an outlet for spent passion. That is to say, Alofa's tears would have melted the murderous resolve of a harsh disciplinarian like Filiga. By refusing to cry, she ironically offers her body as the sacrificial lamb slaughtered for the sins of others as well, for she knows only too well why her father is punishing her:

I was the punisher and he the punished...and he knew it...and I knew it. We both knew it too well. By beating me he was beating himself. Beating the Wind. Beating Mrs Samasoni. Beating the memory of that bridge-umbrella rainy day when I saw him naked – completely naked (1996a: 216).

As a mere child in the cultural configuration of village politics, Alofa has no agency over her own body, especially in the public sphere. The hierarchical structure of Malaefou society ranks her body as a biological entity to be nurtured with food, love, religion, to be a provider of domestic labour around the house, to obey without question, to be disciplined with strict rules, and to be punished if she breaks these rules. Alofa rejects suicide; all she has is her self, and she exercises her right to her self by willing herself not to cry. It is her only way to beat the system, Filiga, the

community and to expose to outsiders a piece of that 'marrow' of a faaSamoaan upbringing. She is taunted by the village children, who demonstrate a familiar aspect of the Samoan sense of humour by composing songs and poems to capture the memory in music. Alofa's body is an open terrain of pain and insults as it is vilified in a raunchy song (Figiel, 1996a: 217) that highlights an aspect of Samoan discourse - what better way to record milestones than to frame them in creative forms of orality and performance, infusing an element of mythicity into the celebrated event.

Alofa's punishment serves as the cathartic element in the course of her adolescent development. Despite the public humiliation of her body - the wounds on her face; the cutting of her hair; the shaving of her head; the forced reconciliation; the raunchy song - Alofa the narrator is still able to rationalise her punishment in a monologue on discipline and love that recaptures the logic of the faaSamoa:

Being beaten up is alofa - love. Real love. Real love is when children are beaten up bad by their parents. Teach the child while he's a child so that he will know when he becomes a man. This is in the Bible. This, too, is written in the earth of Malaefou. To beat a child is to give her respect, to teach her how to behave, to teach her to be humble, to listen, to obey, to love her.

A parent (a father especially) did not love his children when he let them roam around like animals, doing whatever they pleased without consequences....

Malaefou parents were defined by the actions of their children, and children in turn were defined by their parent's wrath (Figiel, 1996: 219).

While it is 'in the Bible' to mould the 'man', 'the earth of Malaefou' is a lot more exacting on the female body as evident in the profusion of feminine pronouns: 'To beat a child is to give *her* respect, to give *her* love, to teach *her* how to behave, to teach *her* to be humble, to listen, to obey, to love *her*' (ibid.). Alofa's efforts to personalise the moral of the story on 'love' reflects a self-denigration of the body riddled with the guilt and conscience resulting from a society saturated with religion.

At the close of *Where We Once Belonged* Alofa has reached this conclusion about personal and family relationships. She analyses the severity of beatings in terms of how much they measure a parents' love. One is tempted to apply Alofa's rationale to other contexts, albeit in the real world, to justify other forms of violence exacted on

the Samoan female body. It could be read as a subversive construction of the contemporary Samoan female body who seeks to defy patriarchal violence or the harsh methods of discipline they were raised under by raising public awareness of such issues the way Figiel has. It could also be interpreted as part of that Samoan ethos on love or alofa that Tuaopepe Felix Wendt explains below:

Alofa is the foundation of the total *fa'a Samoa* (the Samoan way of life) ...

Alofa is the principal component of the Samoan ethos. That concept is instilled from birth, as Samoans are taught about the importance of every bond...It permeates all levels of the social life of Samoa. It is the essence of the "bright side" of Samoan side, which far outshines the "darker side" that Freeman has dwelt on with such excess (1984: 98).

Given the paramount importance of alofa in the totality of the *faaSamoa*, Alofa's claim that 'Real love is when children are beaten up bad by their parents' may be full of problematic implications but at the same time it accounts for the essentialist ethos of Samoan culture. The irony of Alofa's simple philosophy is evident in the words 'beaten up bad', but the reality of such a candid observation is merely a literary 'trick', to cite Octavio Paz (Paz, 1993), utilised by Figiel to 'raise issues' that impact on the agency and empowerment of the Samoan female body in today's society. 'To be beaten up bad' is normally reserved for boys for violation of serious codes of ethics, while girls are disciplined less heavily. Alofa's punishment is, I argue, more of a 'literary trick' to shock the reader into an awareness of issues relating to the Samoan female body that, according to Figiel, need to be 'discussed' (Interview, 2002).

Figiel's construction of the Samoan female body can therefore be read as a bounded, tabooed text that is under the watchful eye and gaze of everyone older than herself, from parents to older siblings to older relatives to the pastor's wife to the school teacher. Under such intense scrutiny, the adolescent female body must map a space for itself within the narrow borders of its communal existence and appropriates models of *aga* or behaviour reflective of the sub-culture to which it belongs.

What gives her the strength and will to succeed where others like Siniva have failed is Alofa's developed sense of self, accompanied by the self-confessed knowledge that :

‘To beat a child...is to love her’. This may seem as outrageous to outsiders as Derek Freeman’s focus on our extremes of passion or Margaret Mead’s flawed findings on our ‘free love society’. While it may be true that Alofa’s childhood certainly borders on the extremes, the answer lies somewhere in her logic on love. It is love or ‘alofa’ that triumphs, the key to unlocking the mystery of how the Samoan female adolescent body can weather the storm and stress of adolescence. It is the key which Mead failed to find and which Figiel uses to open the door to a liberating vision of the Samoan female body.

CHAPTER 4: THE SAMOAN FEMALE BODY IN DIASPORA

Being Samoan can mean different people in different settings, similar to Bradd Shore's metaphor of a Samoan personality being that of a multifaceted gem, with each face expressing a different aspect within cultural-political economies (Liu, 1991: 168).

A migrant is a person who has crossed the border. S/he seeks a place to make 'a new beginning', to start again, to make a better life. The newly arrived have to learn the new language and culture. They have to cope not only with the pain of separation but often also with the resentments of a hostile population (Sarup, 1996:1).

The final book in Figiel's trilogy on the Samoan female body, *they who do not grieve*, takes the search for personal identity to a new level of consciousness as Alofa, her grandmother Tausi and Auntie Fue subvert the gendered and cultural constructs of their bodies in response to a new sense of place and belonging. As Sarup asserts above, identities in diaspora are 'limited by borders and boundaries'. The mere act of migrating to another country involves more than a transition in time and place. It is implicated in the dislocation of a body from its native or local environment and its re-positioning within a foreign culture. It subjects the migrant body to a worldview which either welcomes the migrant body for its exoticism or resents it for its otherness. Depending on one's sense of self, one can either negotiate a place within one's new environment as an empowered body or succumb to the sense of loss caused by migration as an abject body (Kristeva, 1991).

In this Chapter, I adopt as a strategic analytical tool Kristeva's definition of the term abjection or the abject body to describe Alofa's grandmother Tausi, who is displaced from her homeland and a tragic past. Her presence in diaspora, in a strange and unfamiliar culture, generates 'A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness....a weight of meaninglessness....which crushes (her)....on the edge of hallucination, of a reality' (Kristeva, 1982: 2). The most elementary form of abjection, according to Kristeva, is created by food loathing. When the diasporic body comes into contact

with unfamiliar food, it experiences a perverse reaction from the body: gagging, nausea, tears, convulsions. In death as in life, Tausi becomes the abject body, the corpse which is the 'utmost of abjection', for as I shall explain in this chapter, Tausi's mavaega or dying wish to be returned to her homeland is blatantly flouted by her daughter Fue. Tausi, in other words, epitomises Kristeva's abject body - riddled with 'lines on this face. This neck. These shoulder blades. These saggy breasts. These bony feet...This old old old body.' (Figiel, 2000: 136). The migrant body of abjection is portrayed both as a reaction to palagi society's particular aversion to or disrespect for old age as well as a terrain of diasporic identity ravaged by dislocation of time and place.

Although Alofa's abjection is produced partly by the same sense of displacement as experienced by Tausi and partly by the torment of her childhood memories, she retains a sense of subjectivity as Tausi's 'silent' companion and in her awareness of her Samoan identity. Regular contact with her friends 'back home' through letters roots her body to a sense of home and reinforce her identity. Her self-induced states of transcendence allow her to retain her sanity and alleviate any state of abjection she may feel from being a body in diaspora:

I ended up imagining all sorts of other things....So that my body was there but my soul would fly quietly out the crack in the window....Out to the sea....Where it met other disenchanted migrant Islanders like me. Looking looking for that cave at the bottom of the sea. The one with the secret paths only we knew about (2000 #377: 138).

Alofa's imaginings correspond with the feelings of disenchantment and disillusionment experienced by other migrant bodies in the foreignness of palagi culture. Their yearning for a homeland they know they may never see again is symbolised by the impossible task of 'looking for that cave', a metonymic association with the mythical other-world of Pulumotu, the final destination for souls of the dead. While the corporeal bodies of migrants are in diasporic existence, their sense of loss is evident in the search for home, for that cave, that original home that constitute for them their collective identity. The personal and social geographies of diaspora creates disenchantment of the soul which is not limited to Alofa, for she meets 'other disenchanted migrant Islanders' like herself. By contrast, Auntie Fue represents the

migrant who is eager to abrogate her Samoan identity and appropriate a palagi model that would give her a palagi identity that is 'almost but not quite' palagi (Bhabha, 1994: 89). Figiel's rendering of these three bodies in diaspora reveals the common problems faced by migrants that are related to nostalgia, language, loss and a search for identity and highlights what Bhabha notes as conditions of 'colonial cultural alienation' (43).

Originating with the Jewish history of involuntary exile in Biblical times, the term diaspora has now come to be used widely as a term for dispersed communities in a state of migration (Spoonley in Macpherson, 2001; Maidment, 1998). It also refers to a state of permanent exile caused by the loss of one's homeland or country of origin, leading to a state of permanent exile. To be a diasporic body means to be actively engaged, like Alofa, in the politics of forging an identity on the basis of a common culture with other migrants, or on the basis of partial or total assimilation with the dominant culture as Fue succeeds in doing with remarkable success. Alternatively, it can mean a total loss of identity accompanied by an intense sense of nostalgia for one's homeland, such as that embodied by Tausi. The whole process of renegotiating a culturally secured identity by these three women is presented by Figiel as a constant intersection of bodies within the contact zone of diaspora.

1. SUSTAINING THE BODY ACROSS CULTURAL BORDERS

Book Two of *they who do not grieve* explores the dynamics of identity in diaspora with the displacement of mind and body that accompanies such an epic shift in place and space. For Tausi, Alofa and Auntie Fue, the promise of a new and better life in New Zealand is either lamented or celebrated according to how well each character negotiates and appropriates her body in relation to the dominant palagi culture. The 'emotional' and 'cultural' baggage each character brings with her to New Zealand has a direct bearing on how well each is able to reconstruct her sense of self and identity as a Pacific Islander/Samoan.

For both Tausi and Alofa, their memories of Samoa can be kept alive or distant by the degree to which each appropriates and embodies her native culture in diasporic space, a mechanism of survival that enables them to cope with the displacement that comes with shifting places (Lavie, 1996). Wearing native wear, eating native food or speaking the native language constitute some of these coping mechanisms. A lack of these contributes to the sense of diasporic despair experienced when the body is nourished instead with food alien to the native body. It seems natural and inevitable therefore that Alofa's narrative on life in New Zealand begins with a simple observation that 'It always starts with food. Potatoes. Pasta. Brown rice. And other food foreign to the saliva in our mouths (Figiel, 2000: 129). As migrants, Alofa and Tausi have to experience what Sarup refers to above as the 'pain of separation' but also alienating palagi customs which aggravate their sense of separation from home. Access to and consumption of native food in a foreign land is seen as both a luxury and a necessity and therefore critical in sustaining a metaphoric link between body and home. More importantly, it reduces the sense of displacement of body and mind created by the re-positioning of one's body in space through migration. While Tausi and Alofa desire to maintain their cultural identity as Samoans by longing for Samoan food, Auntie Fie strives to serve palagi food in an attempt to erase her Samoan identity altogether.

Cultural geographers David Bell and Gill Valentine describe the cultural significance of food as of 'central importance', a way for ethnic bodies to cross boundaries in a symbolic manner in order to construct a 'self-conscious subjective reality' in diaspora (Bell, 1997: 114). Native food is therefore a powerful marker of cultural identity for diasporic bodies, especially old ones like Tausi, who yearn for

Kalo and fa'i and even ka'amu...Ulu even for sustenance of the body and peace of mind that comes with the knowledge that one's children have gone out of their way in a land full of food to fetch them the food they were used to ³⁷ (Figiel, 2000: 132).

In Tausi's eyes, food comes to signify the ultimate in filial love. While Fie feeds her mother 'food foreign' to Tausi's mouth, the children of Pola and Misiluki go out of

³⁷ Samoan staple foods: kalo – taro; fa'i – green banana; ulu – breadfruit; ,

their way to purchase the Samoan food their parents' desire, the 'food they were used to':

food that stuck to your bones. To your flesh. That should make any parent proud. Proud in the fact that all is not lost...that they actually did something with their children. Showed them their place. Showed them a child's obligation, which is always to his or her parent.
(2000: 132)

Food is not just a source of sustenance in the faaSamoa but a cultural signifier of love and respect. In fact, the success of any ceremonial occasion is measured by satisfaction with the type and amount of food provided for guests. Fue shows no respect or fa'aaloalo for her mother, and by extension, no love. She has transgressed the Fourth Commandment. Bringing her mother to New Zealand may indeed be viewed as a measure of filial love, but this is lost on Tausi as she laments her daughter's shortcomings: 'I know this is a big country. Much bigger than Samoa. Which makes the gesture of fetching kalo for your parent even more meaningful. Where did I go wrong, Alofa? Tell me! Where did I go wrong? Aue!' (132). Fue's failure to give her mother cultural sustenance triggers the state of abjection which eventually kills Tausi's spirit and later her body.

The body yearns for a return home as a mechanism of survival to compensate the lack of native food experienced in diaspora. It is Tausi who feels this sense of loss so acutely that she vows 'If I eat one more potato, I'll force all the shit in my body to come out my mouth during dinnertime' (135). Such a remark is uncharacteristic of a respectable matriarch but demonstrates the extent of her abjection (Kristeva, 1982). For Tausi, nostalgia for Samoan food develops into an excruciating longing and desire, the lack of which threatens her sense of selfhood and provokes a reaction bordering on neurosis. The juxtaposed images of a bland diet of potatoes served by Fue versus the wholesome Samoan staples such as taro which 'only add that flavour to their stories' about Samoa disrupts Tausi's sense of decorum, for instead of professing gratitude towards a dutiful daughter who has brought her from the islands, Fue's neglect in providing her mother with Samoan food provokes a stream of ridicule and contempt:

And now here we are. In this country I've heard so much about. It's so cold here. So cold my bones are about to jump out of my flesh. So cold and all locked up in these boxes like pigeons. Like pigs. Sitting here in *her* house. Not *our* house but *her* house. Waiting for *him* to come home and she's all ready with potatoes and brown rice and that sticky stuff and drinks and God knows what else to pour down his throat. A disgrace, if there ever was one. (Figiel, 2000: 135)

Tausi's scorn is levelled at both Fue and her palagi husband - symbolic of a marginalized body in diaspora uprooted from the security of a cultural selfhood and misplaced in a foreign setting in which all sense of identity is disrupted. While the lack of native food initiates Tausi's state of abjection, it is the memories of home that present her with the most devastating dislocation of body and spirit.

2. THE ABJECT BODY IN DIASPORA

In a creative twist of plot, Figiel presents a complex interplay of bodies in desire and betrayal which connects the elderly bodies of Lalolagi and Tausi and supplies the cultural context to Tausi's abjection in diaspora. What we learn from Malu in Book One of *they who do not grieve* about the history of Lalolagi's unfinished tattoo is providentially fulfilled as Tausi's body is transformed into a metaphor of an abject body vilified by what she believes is a manifestation of Lalolagi's curse on her.

Tausi is no longer the matriarch whose words of praise or admonition resound with the noise of birds of many varied feathers and colours. That is to say, the elderly body in diaspora is now an abject body, displaced by forced assimilation into a foreign culture and with limited or no access to cultural structures of customs and traditions such as native food, native language, native customs – a body bereft of the rich resonance of orality. The boundaries of space and place inscribed by diaspora on her body is limited to the mere length and breadth of a bedroom, that limited geography of space whose borders and walls are the habits and patterns of behaviour of an alien

palagi culture (Anzaldua, 1987). Forced by age and a fiapalagi daughter to observe cultural rituals in the restricted space of a bedroom, Tausi appropriates her private space to affirm a sense of self and liberates her body from the ravages of painful memory and accursed history. This is accomplished through the ancient art of oral literature in which she, the storyteller, and her personality become immersed in the myth or legend recounted to her granddaughter. It is there within the 'borderlands' of the bedroom that Tausi passes on her legacy of secrets to Alofa. The dark secrets of her tattooed body are finally revealed in a mythical tale of love and betrayal that sheds light on her abjection.

The exact origin of Tausi's abject body is soon revealed in her confession to Alofa. Like Lalolagi, her body is a complex intersection of personal tragedies and cultural dilemmas inscribed in irrevocable marks of infamy on her body. She herself is a victim of rape by a 'sleepcrawler' or moetolo. Although Schoeffel claims that 'In my view moetotolo is neither abhorrent nor abnormal in the context of the Samoan attitude to sexuality'³⁸ (Schoeffel, 1979:184), Isaia's theorizing of this Samoan model of sexual deviancy is a more realistic, historically accurate and authentic, to explain this appalling practice by some men. Isaia, writing from the perspective of a Samoan male, clarifies the cultural stigma of a moetolo:

To be caught in the act of moetolo attracts severe traditional punishments if her family doesn't get to you first. 'You sleep crawler' (Lou mea moe kokolo) is a phrase that is a real shame not only for you but also your family (Isaia 1999: 147).

Even though Tausi is a victim of moetolo, she is trapped by her fear of incurring shame on her husband's family. Consequently, the abjection of her body and spirit is sanctioned by her silence:

He (for I cannot bear to utter his name) would come into my mosquito net in the middle of the night. When everyone else was asleep. He would tell me to be quiet about it. What would the family think? What would Filiga think? Would anyone ever believe me? I don't know, Alofa. I did what I thought was right. I carried the baby to term (Fiegel, 2000: 153).

³⁸ I have yet to come across a Samoan woman who holds the same views as Schoeffel. It is like claiming that in the context of contemporary western attitudes to sexuality, paedophilia is neither abhorrent nor abnormal.

Tausi's powerlessness in putting a stop to her brother-in-law's nightly 'visits' illustrates the realities of patriarchal power that are played out on the female body caught in similar situations. Caught between the shame of being stigmatised as unfaithful and immoral and the collective shame such a disclosure would bring upon the good name of the family or village, there would be little incentive for Tausi to protest or proclaim her innocence, thereby perpetuating the 'unspoken' violation of her body by her brother-in-law. This is yet another case of what Figiel identifies as the 'silent, unspoken' voices of women such as Tausi.

Tausi's betrayal of Lalolagi seems all the more alarming, given that she and Lalolagi are the best of friends. While she eagerly betrays her best friend Lalolagi to the tattooist's wife, she herself is implicated in a moral dilemma, for she is in love with the tattooist. The reader's awareness of Tausi's flawed character removes any vestige of pity or sympathy s/he may have for her abject body. While she possesses an authentic female body inscribed with the traditional symbols of the female tattoo, the *malu*, the cultural signs on her thighs become a signifier not of the honour and dignity accorded to those brave enough to be tattooed, but of betrayal and dishonour.

From a traditional perspective, Tausi's diasporic body is an abject body punished by supernatural reckoning for the betrayal of her friend Lalolagi. Nowhere is this more evident than in the fact that her *mavaega* or dying wishes are completely ignored by Fua. Tausi is condemned through her daughter's insensitivity to be buried in diaspora, the ultimate state of abjection for a diasporic body – she can never find that 'entrance to the cave' of Pulout. Deprived at death of that connection with ancestral origins, she is made to suffer the eternal severance of body and mind reserved for spirits of the dispossessed, true to Lalolagi's curse on her. It is her punishment to be buried in New Zealand, demonstrating both her daughter's violation of that sacred covenant between parent and sibling as well as her own violation of her *feagaiga* or covenant with her friend Lalolagi. The irony of Tausi's abject body is that in diaspora, the embodiment of a body coded with the inscribed text of the tattooist's craft becomes instead a symbol of total cultural alienation and abjected identity. Spatial distance from her homeland of Samoa does not moderate the tenacity of Lalolagi's curse. The open

space of Malaefou gives way to a restricted space of belonging that intensifies the sense of displacement from one's native culture and family.

The bedroom becomes a sacred ground for Alofa and Tausi, a site in which diasporic bodies can re-cross cultural boundaries by means of orality in speaking in the native tongue. The ritualistic aspect of these nightly exchanges between grandmother and granddaughter is expressed in a manner consistent with migrant bodies lost in a search for meaning within the 'unchartered seas' (Anzaldua, 1987) of diaspora: 'These talks occurred always in the bedroom. Our space. Where we spoke our language. Shared our thoughts. But mostly Tausi talking and me nodding. Like some new-found ritual we alone shared' (Figiel, 2000: 137).

Restricted by spatial boundaries of the bedroom and the constrictive boundaries of palagi society, Tausi's abjection is more intensely experienced in her lamentations to Alofa:

The centipedes on my thighs are eating me alive, Alofa. They've been doing that since the day they were born. Eating eating eating until there's nothing but bones, you know? Oh, if only you knew half the world I carry on these thighs of mine. Only half. But that is my punishment. To carry the world naked on these thighs. To be eaten alive by centipedes for the rest of my life (Figiel, 2000: 152).

Despite being fully clothed and wrapped in a lavalava, Tausi is haunted by a sense of nakedness – of being exposed to the gaze or scrutiny of others in a strange land. Her completed malu is her shame and her curse, made all the more punitive by her admission that 'the centipedes on my thighs are eating me alive'. In an ironic reversal, Figiel renders the body with the completed malu the abject one of displacement. Contrary to cultural expectations of the status accorded female bodies inscribed with the malu, Tausi can only view hers with remorse if not revulsion.

Her displacement is made all the more acute due to the painful process of 'spinning her sinnet of memories' nightly in the darkness of her bedroom. The act of spinning refers to the stories she and Alofa tell each other of life in Samoa in an attempt to sustain that connection to homeland that is so crucial to a sense of identity. While the unavailability of native food may adversely affect a sense of identity, the opportunity

to speak the native language reinforces significantly one's awareness of self in a foreign country:

Language binds us together. Language and memories...Mémoires...I started telling stories about Sundays in Samoa. Describing everything from the church service in the morning to the time we turned off the kerosene lamps in the evenings. 'Remember the time we got electricity?' she said. And I nodded my head. Mentioning, too, all the names of the congregation and their idiosyncrasies (Figiel, 2000: 155)

Figiel's representation of Tausi can be interpreted as an ironic counter-commentary on the stereotype of a Samoan migrant who is so enamoured of her adopted country that she mimics all the habits and lifestyles of the palagi culture. Instead of embracing the material comforts of the palagi culture however, Tausi tries her best to resist acculturation and thereby claim in a reverse sense a degree of agency for herself. However, the history of her tattooed thighs dictates that she can never be in full control of her body or her fate in diaspora. Her abjection is all the more profound because she carries Lalolagi's curse on her body, which means that her biggest fear of dying in a strange country will be prophetically realised.

3. THE HYBRID BODY IN DIASPORA

By contrast, the body of Auntie Fue represents the migrant whose identity is dependent on assimilation into the dominant palagi culture. The outcome of this voluntary assimilation is a hybrid body that, in Homi Bhabha's terminology, is 'almost the same, but not quite' as the palagi model she tries to imitate or mimic (1994: 89). Fue's enthusiasm in adopting her palagi husband's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values is portrayed as a conscious effort to gain authenticity within, if not full admission into, mainstream palagi culture. Passion and patriotism for her adopted country outweigh her desire to be identified as Samoan, to the extent that she affects the hybrid body caught within a 'liminal period of

confusion',³⁹ to coin a phrase used by Samoan scholar Melani Anae (1998: 326). Fue's obsessive adherence to a palagi lifestyle alienates her from not only her Samoan culture but also her mother. By changing her name after marrying a palagi and moving to New Zealand, she personifies Homi Bhabha's 'mimic (wo)man' in her desire to imitate the palagi - an imitation that borders either on the ridiculous or on a menace. There is a hint of sarcasm tinged with moralising in the description of Fue:

Before she left Samoa she used to dance for tourists at the Sunset Inn, one of the biggest hotels at that time. The first thing Fue did when she started dancing was to change her name from Fuemaleto'oto'o (which means instruments of wisdom as carried by a talking chief whenever he is addressing the village) to Miss Jacint-ha, Polynesian Dancing Queen par excellence, a name suggested to her by her 'friend' Jack the Beachcomber, an alcoholic American who spent his days painting velvet nudes of Fue (Figiel, 2000: 143).

What is highly ironical about Fue is that her real name, Fuemaleto'oto'o, is culturally significant, for it is a signifier of the emblems of a talking chief: the fue or fly whisk and the to'oto'o or staff. These cultural symbols are inscribed on the body of the Tuli seen by Alofa in the final paragraph of *Where we once belonged* as she walks from Siniva's grave back to the village, remembering Siniva's words to her: 'This is wisdom. They belonged to a talking chief. When a talking chief dies, he passes these on to his sons and daughters. He hands wisdom through the strength of the to'oto'o and the fue' (1996a: 196).

Figiel's portrayal of Fue hinges on the irony that, while Fue's name symbolises the ultimate expression of cultural authority, her aga and amio as a fia-palagi is a denial of that culture and identity and consequently the wisdom as symbolised in her name. For total assimilation to take place, one has to divest oneself of all evidence of one's former culture. Changing names is the first step. The second step is the mixed marriage, which Fue, true to the model of the mimic (wo)man, accomplishes with the ease and grace of a Polynesian dancing girl. Albert Memmi describes such a marriage as an 'extreme expression' and his model of the colonized informs the character of Fue as the wife of a palagi. Changing one's name, rejecting one's culture, one's

³⁹ I apply Anae's discourse on the identity journeys of New Zealand-born Samoans to the character of Fue in the context of Fue's efforts to reject her Samoan identity and adopt a papalagi persona. See Anae, M. *Fofoa-i-vao-ese*, 1998: Ph.D. Thesis, Auckland University.

language, one's way of life, one's traditional values and beliefs is analogous to Memmi's conceptualising of the colonized:

Rejection of self and love of another are common to all candidates for assimilation. Moreover, the two components of this attempt at liberation are closely tied. Love of the colonizer is subtended by a complex of feelings ranging from shame to self-hate (Memmi, 1965: 12).

Memmi's explanation of the debasement of the colonized's morality in order to liberate her or himself is manifested in the way Fua uses her body as a tool of 'liberation', that is, liberating her native self from the controlling chains of her faaSamoa upbringing in Samoa and her avowed desire or love for a palagi lifestyle in New Zealand. Fua therefore uses her body as her instrument of liberation – it becomes a commodified or fetishized object that can be 'traded' as a valuable artefact in order to satisfy the palagi's desire for the erotic and exotic in return for what she considers the exciting and culturally superior lifestyle of the palagi. In her radical attempts at liberation, Fua meanwhile embodies Memmi's construct of the colonized who marries into the colonizer's world as a means of escape from the cultural constraints of an indigenous lifestyle. As she tells Alofa, marrying Phillip and coming to Gili Sila has enabled her to provide her family in Samoa with palagi customs such as

sitting on the chair...Eating potatoes and pork chops and green salads...and ice cream for desert...sleep on a bed...In a room....know what a mailman was, since there was none in Samoa (Figiel, 2000: 143)

Fua's conscious attempts at self-effacement of her cultural identity can be analysed as an extreme case of one suffering from the effects of a 'cultural bomb', a social or cultural malady identified by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, in *Decolonising the Mind*:

the effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people's languages rather than their own (Ngũgĩ, 1986: 3).

Fue's transculturation extends to the physical, social, intellectual and psychological aspects of diasporic life and demonstrates Ngugi's contention that diasporic subjects like Fue see themselves and their past in their native countries a 'wasteland of non-achievement' (3) from which they should distance themselves. This lead to what Ngugi calls 'colonial alienation.' (17) and is evident in the ways Fue tries to transform Alofa into a cultural replica of herself:

Viv instructed me the day after my arrival that I was not to speak Samoan to her. Or to the children....

The night we were eating mussel fritters was the night Viv told me never to marry a Samoan or an Islander. She was mixing the salad when she said it. Very casually. As if she had asked me to pass the salt. Or the tomato sauce....

This is for your own good. You need to find a good man who will take care of you.... You're supposed to look out for your family.... The only way for you to do that is to avoid anyone who's struggling.... Remember Alofa, this is not Samoa (Figiel, 2000: 149).

Fue's efforts to change Alofa into a mimic wo(man) like herself extends from a ban on speaking Samoan to eating palagi food to answering the telephone in a manner reminiscent of a palagi maid to procuring a palagi husband for Alofa. This begins on the first night of Tausi's and Alofa's arrival. When Alofa answers the telephone, she is at a loss to identify the 'Phillip' for whom the caller asks. Philip turns out to be Fue's husband and the episode ends embarrassingly with Alofa given a name change and other lessons in answering the telephone:

You have to be very polite when you're on the phone.... And always address whoever is on the phone as sir or madam. Oh, and I thought it a good idea for you to use Donna from now on. It's a good name for a girl like you. And it's easier for them to pronounce. And you know what? It even sounds better, if you ask me. Understand? (2000: 157)

The above episode illustrates the humour and irony that Figiel uses to portray migrants like Fue or, on a theoretical level, Ngugi's colonized who are so steeped in the quagmire of colonialist pretension that all associations with their native cultures are deemed inferior and worthless in favour of what they perceive as the superior culture of their adopted homeland. Self-negation of a Samoan identity is accompanied by the mimicry of a palagi identity and lifestyle (Bhabha, 1994). Fue urges Alofa to re-invent herself as Donna, marry a palagi and 'avoid anyone who's struggling'. To

Fue, physical distance from her homeland severs the traditional bonds that link her to its cultural values': 'This is not Samoa' (Figiel, 2000: 149).

Fue's attempts to facilitate Alofa's assimilation into palagi culture are not rejected outright by Alofa for fear of transgressing traditional values of respect for elders. Rather, they are resisted by means of ironic and sarcastic observations of Fue's behaviour and mannerisms as she tries to imitate the ways of a palagi woman:

She took the receiver from me and removed an earring before she pressed it to her ear. 'Hello. Heath Residence,' she said. Brushing her free hand through the body of her straight ironed hair.

There was a confidence in Auntie Viv's voice when she did that. I did not just hear that in her voice but in her entire body. From the hair on her head all the way to the red on her toenails (156).

'Auntie Viv' is the true 'mimic (wo)man', a comic version of the Samoan who has what Fanon calls a 'black skin' but wears a 'white mask' (Fanon 1986). With her social and cultural pretensions, she is what Samoans would call a fiapalagi, a generic term used to label Samoan-born Samoans in New Zealand who prefer the palagi lifestyle (Anae, 1998). Alofa, on the other hand, copes with the cultural alienation inherent in diaporic identity construction in several ways.

4. RESISTING ASSIMILATION

Alofa remains in active dialogue with friends Moa and Lili through poignant letters that reveal the sense of isolation and loneliness experienced by the displaced body of the migrant in diaspora. The letters serve not only as a narrative device of subjectivity for Alofa but also as a literary tool to link the community of characters in all three works, thus enhancing the cyclical nature of life and reinforce a sense of belonging to a place, a community like Malaefou:

I thank our ancestress Aolele for her protection over us in this country called Giu Sila. It is so cold here that Tausi sleeps with an electric blanket....Giu Sila is not at all like I imagined

it to be. But there's a pear tree in the back yard and a lemon tree, too. I haven't seen a lamb, though (Figiel, 2000: 139).

Alofa's letters to Moa convey the loneliness and disillusionment invoked by the experience of diaspora. There is an ironic twist to her references to preconceived images of life in Gili Sika: the pear and lemon trees and the lamb, symbols of a Cytherean world that she, like other migrants, equate with the promise of a new and better life. While Alofa describes to her friends her new life in diaspora, the reader is made aware of a double irony. The photographer Rangi insists on capturing Alofa's exotic looks on camera while Alofa remarks that 'If Rangi is an indication of how Maoris look, then I must say that Maori people look just like us' (Figiel, 2000: 139). There is an ironic interplay of gazes here, each one inverting the other. The eye of the Maori woman intersects with that of the Samoan migrant and the tension is created by the juxtapositioning of each one's preconceived images and ideas about the exoticness of the other. While Rangi duplicates the palagi stereotype of the Samoan female body as exotic other, the Samoan native is also implicated in the project of image construction and stereotyping of others, for Alofa's surprise that Rangi looks 'just like us' imply preconceptions of the other, in this case the Maori. This underpins Figiel's concern with the way in which stereotyping precludes a deeper insight into people's character or nature (Interview, 2002), a characteristic of stock representation that is not confined to palagi perceptions of the other but implicate native notions of others as well.

In addition to letters, Alofa utilises the physical boundaries of her bedroom to recreate a metonymic extension of homeland at night. When Phillip shows her to her room, Alofa is almost delirious with the knowledge that for the first time in her communal life, she is in possession of a space that belongs totally to herself:

'This is to be your room, Alofa, love. Your room.' I never thought I would get to hear those words. *Your* room.

Suddenly, I felt elated. As if I had grown wings. Wings so large they were larger than those of the aeroplane that brought me to this country. And the wings were not white as I always imagined them. Rather they were flaming red (148).

Alofa's sense of elation at the privilege of having her *own* room is expressed in the metaphor of 'wings', for like a bird freed from the cage of cultural confinement to soar in flight, her wings are 'flaming red' to illustrate the intense feelings of joy at the sense of ownership of her own private space. However, her euphoria is short-lived as nostalgia and memories force her to compare her diasporic and homeland space:

The house I am living in now is different from the house where I was brought up. For one thing, the number of people has shrunk so much that sometimes I wonder to myself if this is all not just a dream. A dream, and I am at the National Hospital. In a doctor's office. And the doctor is telling me to undress In a large empty room. Empty of all the sounds that I am used to. Pigs grunting. Children laughing. Dogs howling. Auntie Lolo beating up on someone. Empty, too, of all the smells that I am used to. Pig shit. Chicken shit. Cow shit. And the smell of my own body after a hot day in the sun (Figiel, 2000: 148).

The spontaneous and feral realism of a village environment is juxtaposed with the sterile and cultivated atmosphere of her urban home, a mental exercise that leaves Alofa bewildered and lost: 'This is not Samoa. Over and over in my mind that night I think about what is and what is not. The only thing I am sure of is nothing. I have nothing but memories of a place I would probably never see again' (149). It is through Alofa's memories that we find out about her Auntie Fue or Viv's background and in particular her own childhood and relationships with her mother Pisa. More importantly, her memories are what sustain her sense of sanity, together with Tausi's, in the evenings when loneliness, despair and longing grip their diasporic bodies:

I started telling stories about Sundays in Samoa. Describing everything from the church service in the morning to the time we turned off the kerosene lamps in the evenings. 'Remember the time we got electricity?' she said. And I nodded my head. Mentioning, too, all the names of the congregation and their idiosyncracies. The very idiosyncracies that used to bother me. That I used to despise. That gave me grief while I was a part of it. But then of course I had different memories from Tausi. Memories that carried me when I could no longer continue. Memories that for all practical purposes were the only sure possessions I owned (p.155).

Alofa's commitment to her culture is clearly manifested in the above passage. Despite her aunt's attempts to deny her native voice by forbidding her from speaking Samoan, Alofa clearly does not fall within Ngugi Thiong'o's categorisation of those who

delude themselves with the 'fatalistic logic of the unassailable position of English' (Ngugi, 1986: 4). In stark contrast to Fae, Alofa sees her native language as vital to her identity as a Samoan rooted to traditions of respect and obligation. As Ngugi states, 'Language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture' (1986: 13). By valorizing English, Fae asserts the superiority of the English language as the carrier of culture.

The dual nature of Alofa's native language helps to liberate her body and soul from further displacement and alienation. Mundane, even unpleasant memories of life back home assume nostalgic significance. Ironically, traditional roles are reversed. Here in New Zealand, it is young Alofa who now assumes the role of storyteller, a role traditionally played by elders. Instead of the myths that are traditionally told by the elderly storyteller, Alofa relays her memories of Malaefou—in particular, the village congregation and their idiosyncracies, which she 'used to despise' (Figiel, 2000: 155) but which now assume critical importance as the 'only sure possessions' she owns in diaspora and which now connect her and Tausi to their homeland.

On a structuralist level, memories become a narrative device for the inscription of meta-memories through which the reader can scrutinise Alofa's innermost feelings about self and others. They give a cultural dimension to her experiences and a deeper insight into her character. In this process of introspection, Alofa discovers an inner strength that helps her cope with life in the diaspora, especially with the stereotypical images associated with being a migrant. Finding the cultural landscape of New Zealand society physically different from home is one thing, but confronting the problem of racism in a supermarket proves to be a demoralising yet epiphanic experience:

The other day a woman ran into her at the supermarket. The woman was clearly at fault but called her a 'Bloody Islander, you should be looking where you're going...' and Alofa remembered actually feeling her anger travel from the moa, up her throat, to her mouth. And everyone looking at her as the words flew out, 'What is it about us that makes you hate us so much, huh? Do we actually have a sign on our foreheads that says, "Bloody Islander, pick on me," or what?' (2000: 201).

Alofa responds to the woman's racism with ambivalent feelings of rage and humiliation that recall experiences of many Islanders as victims of similar racist or discriminatory remarks (Anae, 1998; Sarup, 1996). At first, her reaction is one of pure rage and rebellion, an assertion of agency that silences the woman. The tears that follow is a form of emotional release in the aftermath of her cross-cultural encounter. Alofa's salvation is the 'elderly white man' whose benevolent interjection can be read as Figiel's vision of a cross-cultural bridge of tolerance and understanding indicative of a multi-cultural society.

5. AGENCY IN DIASPORA

Alofa's defiance in the face of overt racism is a sign of the agency that arises from her experience in diaspora. Her character, rooted in a strong sense of self as the daughter of Filiga and Pisa and the granddaughter of Tausi, develops into one who refuses to be 'enslaved by [her] inferiority' (Fanon, 60). In *Where we once belonged*, the young Alofa survives a traditional Samoan upbringing that embodies all the cultural inscriptions of the faaSamoa way of life in a village steeped in a volatile cultural setting of tradition and modernity. At the end of Figiel's first novel, Alofa has developed a personal identity nurtured by a Samoan upbringing and founded on a strong foundation of cultural, Christian and moral values. The Tuli of Tomorrow symbolises not just a cultural signifier of cosmic proportions but on a metaphoric level signifies the pioneering and ingenious capacity of Tagaloa's progeny, Alofa, to journey to and settle new horizons.⁴⁰

The Tuli, as Tagaloa's mythic messenger, is crucial to the way in which Alofa deals with the physical aspects of her cultural dislocation. With the opposite ends of the diasporic spectrum occupied by the 'almost, but not quite' white body of Fue and the alienated, withered, tattooed body of Tausi, Alofa's body is positioned in the middle,

⁴⁰ The Tuli according to Samoa's oral history is Tagaloa's messenger sent down to the lower heavens or lalolagi to oversee Tagaloa's creation.

occupying a hybrid space of agency and ambivalence within palagi mainstream culture. That is to say, she straddles the borderlands of myth and modernity (Bhabha, 1994). The strength and depth of her commitment to her Samoan identity is manifested in her devotion to her grandmother and her friends back in Samoa and her relatives. She clings steadfastly to her cultural identity through language and memories and refuses to be a passive victim of the colonialist mindset, but she also accommodates the demands of New Zealand society by joining the workforce and embarking on a new role of a blue collar migrant worker, a role to which is attached a new set of stereotypical constructions at the hands of

white men who [don't] know a damn thing about...[islanders]. Their history. Where they come from. That they didn't all come from the same island. That they don't all look the same. That they are different from one another as night is from day (Figiel, 2000: 190)

Alofa's resistance to the homogenizing tendencies of stereotypes about Islanders echoes the calls for ethnic-specific understanding of island peoples (Hau'ofa, 1993). Her new found freedom in diaspora gives her the opportunity to explore her sexuality in a new context. While still compelled by cultural obligations of the feagaiga to keep her sexual relationship with Apa a secret from her Auntie Fue, she nevertheless demonstrates a certain naivety or innocence when it comes to her body, for while Apa regards it as a perfect model of art, Alofa considers her own body as primordially unattractive and unworthy. Her artist lover however, in an ironical analogy with Gauguin, romanticizes her native body in a passionate eulogy that reinforces in Alofa a sense of secured identity and self as desired and desirable over that of the palagi bodies of Apa's admirers:

You're my woman and you're beautiful...Your lips are sweeter than the only memory of mango I have before I left Samoa....Your dark dark hair wrapped around my turpentine-scented fingers. Who am I to touch your hair, Alofa?...I am no one. No one but a scarred-faced nigger from the same island....So who am I to touch the silk in your hair? In your skin. Your breasts. Your stomach. Your thighs. Your big, smooth, beautiful tattooed thighs, Alofa. I eat the fish that live on your thighs. Caressing the spears, the green centipedes, the stars with my tongue....I do not cease to be amazed by the beauty I see every time I see the flower that lives by the lake between your thighs (194).

Apa's declaration of love signifies a blind obsession with the female native body. Rich in metaphors from the natural landscape of island life, Apa's testimony is analogous to the romantic idiom of Bougainville that Figiel re-appropriates to illustrate the intersections of palagi and Samoan constructions of images of the Samoan female body. Apa's representation of Alofa's body above is crucial in terms of the native and exotic imagery he uses to break down the barriers of shame and self-consciousness that Alofa has about her own native body. Raised in a culture of sexual constraints and taboos associated with the female body and now living in a consumer society where the female body is a sexual commodity, Alofa expresses scepticism that anyone would be interested in her body as a work of art, let alone a desirable sex object. When Apa says to her, 'Sit there, Alofa, against the light, I want to paint you' (193), the underlying irony of juxtaposed images of Jack the beachcomber painting 'velvet nudes of Foe' in Samoa and Apa's painting of the natural landscape of Alofa's native body is unmistakable and summon a sense of the uncanny.

In New Zealand, Alofa is confronted with images of the palagi female body that contradict native conceptions of the Samoa female body and create a sense of lack. Alofa demonstrates this sense of despair when she replies to Apa's request: 'You think people would wanna look at me, Apa? This bony neck? These prunes for breasts? And thick thigh, too? Are you making fun of me?' (193). When Apa begs her not to listen to those 'bastards' and cries out 'Look at what they've made you feel' (193), Alofa justifies her lack of confidence about her body:

But how can you not listen to them, Apa?...You're the goose that laid the golden egg for them. And me? I'm nowhere. Nothing...I go to the dairy to buy sugar and they hand me pamphlets on beauty creams, and it's always a white, blonde-haired, skinny woman-girl-nymph smiling with whiter than white teeth. (Figiel, 2000: 194)

In bold contrast to Apa's poetic prose on her body, Alofa's passionate narrative about the palagi female body exemplify the ambivalent hybridity of images she has to contend with. The image is a symbol of palagi objectification of the body that Figiel sets out to deconstruct through her native characters. Alofa's earlier fixation with a notion of ideal beauty that complies with this palagi stereotype of (white) female

beauty collapses when Apa rebuffs the sophistication of his palagi admirers for the real, the authentic body of the Samoan woman.

The Samoan female body in diaspora as characterised by Alofa asserts a newfound agency by celebrating an ambivalent identity that embodies a multi-faceted persona. This ambivalence creates the cultural landscape for her to exist in a form of authentic hybridity that separates yet connects her at the same time with similar Samoan women in a postmodern context. This mode of hybridity is different from the total assimilation or mimicry displayed by women such as Auntie Fue. While Fue transforms herself through body and mind to think, talk, dress and live like a palagi, Alofa is content to occupy an ambivalent position as one who values her cultural identity as a Samoan but who is also eager to break with traditions that tended to silence women such as her mother Pisa and her grandmother Tausi, hence her rejection of Apa and her willingness to 'stand on [her] own two feet' (204). Her eagerness to embrace an individuality that allows her the 'freedom to find [her] own way [in diaspora]' (204) sets her apart from the collective consciousness of migrant identity which is constructed and developed within the safe boundaries of home and family. Alofa displays the ambivalence and hybridity of the contemporary Samoa female woman who discovers a new sense of individual identity in diaspora and seeks to cross boundaries into uncharted places.

This hybridity of body in mind and matter is conducive to a conception and construction of a hybrid identity which appears more 'fragmented' in the sense of multiple identities – there is the individual and the collective, traditional and innovative – which define or characterise Alofa's introspections in *Where we once belonged* about a person with 'many layers'. Alofa's rejection of her native artist lover and her estrangement from Auntie Fue can be read as her own lament for the nostalgia of what once was: '...I too feel dispossessed...Nothing matters to me anymore. I don't even know if I want to return to Samoa...Don't even know anything anymore. I just don't' (Figiel, 2000: 202). The new Alofa chooses to be a corporeal entity whose hybridity borders not on a full-scale mimicry of the dominant culture as her Auntie Fue embodies, but on an ambivalent intersection of the collective and individual identities developed from diasporic existence. Consequently, while she may appear to be embracing an individualism that may be construed as "western" or

palagi, on closer analysis she reflects Figiel's vision of the contemporary Samoan woman who can empower herself to do anything, without traditional intervention from men. When Alofa admits to Apa: 'I can never do it if I'm with you' (204), she is claiming that agency to negotiate a sense of 'secured identity' for herself in modern society, be it in diaspora or 'back home' (Anae, 1998).

The body has come full circle in traversing geographies of place and space with an awareness of its hybridity and in particular its agency in the construction of that hybridity. It is a symbolic affirmation of Figiel's project of liberating the Samoan female body, which, while some might condemn as too "feminist" (Alofa) or too "fiapalagi" (Fue), the contemporary Samoan woman would welcome as a celebration of her freedom, her agency and ultimately her voice to express her identity in various contexts and on her own terms.

CONCLUSION: 'E AU LE INAILAU A TAMAITAI!'⁴¹

Sia Figiel has joined the ranks of Samoan women whose achievements might be viewed by outsiders as exceptional considering their traditional roles in a patriarchal system of cultural governance, but who are simply appropriating coping mechanisms to complement and improve their roles and statuses in society. That is to say, her appropriation of the Samoan female body in her fiction confers a liberating agency on the Samoan woman to claim her own space and place in literary discourse.

There are numerous role models to emulate from the history of famous Samoan female bodies. From oral history, there is Tapuitea whose voraciousness for the human flesh of her siblings is later transformed into a covenant or feagaiga with her brother that she would be the morning star giving light and guidance to all; there is the Siamese twins Taema and Tilafaiga who brought the art of the tatau to Samoa; there is Figiel's re-constructed Aolele of true Samoan beauty whose virtuous body and beauty is closely guarded by her seven brothers while she attends to her domestic chores of keeping house; and there is Nafanua, national deity of war whose skills and prowess in war are invoked and sought after in wars of succession. From the historical past, there is Salamasina, the first sovereign ruler of Samoa to hold the ancient office of Tafaifa; there is her namesake and national icon of true Samoan womanhood, the late Tooa Salamasina, whose leadership of Papauta School became synonymous with the total education of the Samoan female body as a true temple of the faaSamoa; there is Dr Aiono Fanaafi who became the first native Samoan to graduate with a Ph.D; and there is Sia Figiel who became the first Samoan and Pacific Islander to win the Commonwealth Award for Best First Book in the Pacific and Asian Region.

The characters of Alofa, Samoana and Malu best signify the subjectivity of the Samoan female body as Figiel explores the innermost corners of their minds through a stream of consciousness narration, a technique of characterisation that unravels the

⁴¹ Literally translated – the ladies complete their row of thatch but not the men. Taken in context, it indicates confidence in women being able to successfully complete a given group-oriented task. See Peggy Fairairn-Dunlop, *Tamaitai Samoa Their Stories*, USP Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1996.

complexity of the Samoan female body from the perspective of the authentic voice of the insider. It is through their voices, their tears and laughter, their joys and tragedies that Figiel is able to liberate their bodies from the literary quagmire of stereotypical images proliferating in western discourse on the Samoan female body. The externalisation of their life stories is both a celebration and a liberation of their uniqueness as individuals within the collective consciousness of the faaSamoa.

Figiel's strategies for liberating the Samoan female body include techniques and literary devices to enhance the sense of freedom that comes with liberation. These range from a social realist mode of representation to expose social issues and problems affecting women; "writing back" to romanticized or one-sided palagi versions of Samoan society as a way of challenging, mocking or humouring; returning the native gaze on the status of the Samoan female body so as to challenge some aspects of traditional doxa and raise issues for debate: the use of myth and metaphor to extract nuances and meaning and create a historical and cultural context within which the essence of the true Samoan woman can be understood; the art of dream as a form of escape into metaphysical existence to escape reality; and the employment of "embodied language" to include or exclude the reader into cultural knowledge systems thorough code-switching and comic satire.

Sina Vaai sums up the true nature of liberation for the Samoan female body: it emanates from a need for 'the [Pacific] other...to enter imaginatively into previously silenced/silent cultural spaces and stories' of Samoan women (1999: 30). Figiel has fulfilled this need through an authentic rendering of the Samoan female body. The Samoan female body that is freed by Figiel's literary imagination can therefore be defined as an authentic entity of agency starkly similar to Wendt's model of a

body coming out of the Pacific, not a body being imposed on the Pacific. It is a blend, a new development...Pacific in heart, spirit, and muscle; a blend in which influences from outside...have been indigenized, absorbed in the image of the local and the national, and in turn have altered the national and local. (Wendt in Hereniko, 1995: 410)

It can be said that Figiel has truly liberated from the pages of her novels an image of that body Vaai and Wendt conceptualise above, for the Samoan female body she has

‘liberated’ embodies that ‘body coming out of the Pacific’. It is the gendered body of the ‘Tuli of Tomorrow...a fue tattooed on her wings, a to’oto’o tattooed on her peak’ and a distinct voice of renewed hope in the future. It can be the body of any Samoan woman of today – bounded and embodied by customs and traditions of the faaSamoa yet self-empowered to navigate new spaces and places in contemporary society.

Given that Alofa and Malu are both texted with the malu, they truly signify the liberated body of the Samoan woman as it is personified in the mythical messenger of Tagaloa, the Tuli of Tomorrow. Figiel’s fiction has fashioned a bold image of the “malu-ed” Samoan female body seeking to carve a niche for itself in Samoan/Pacific/Western discourse.

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